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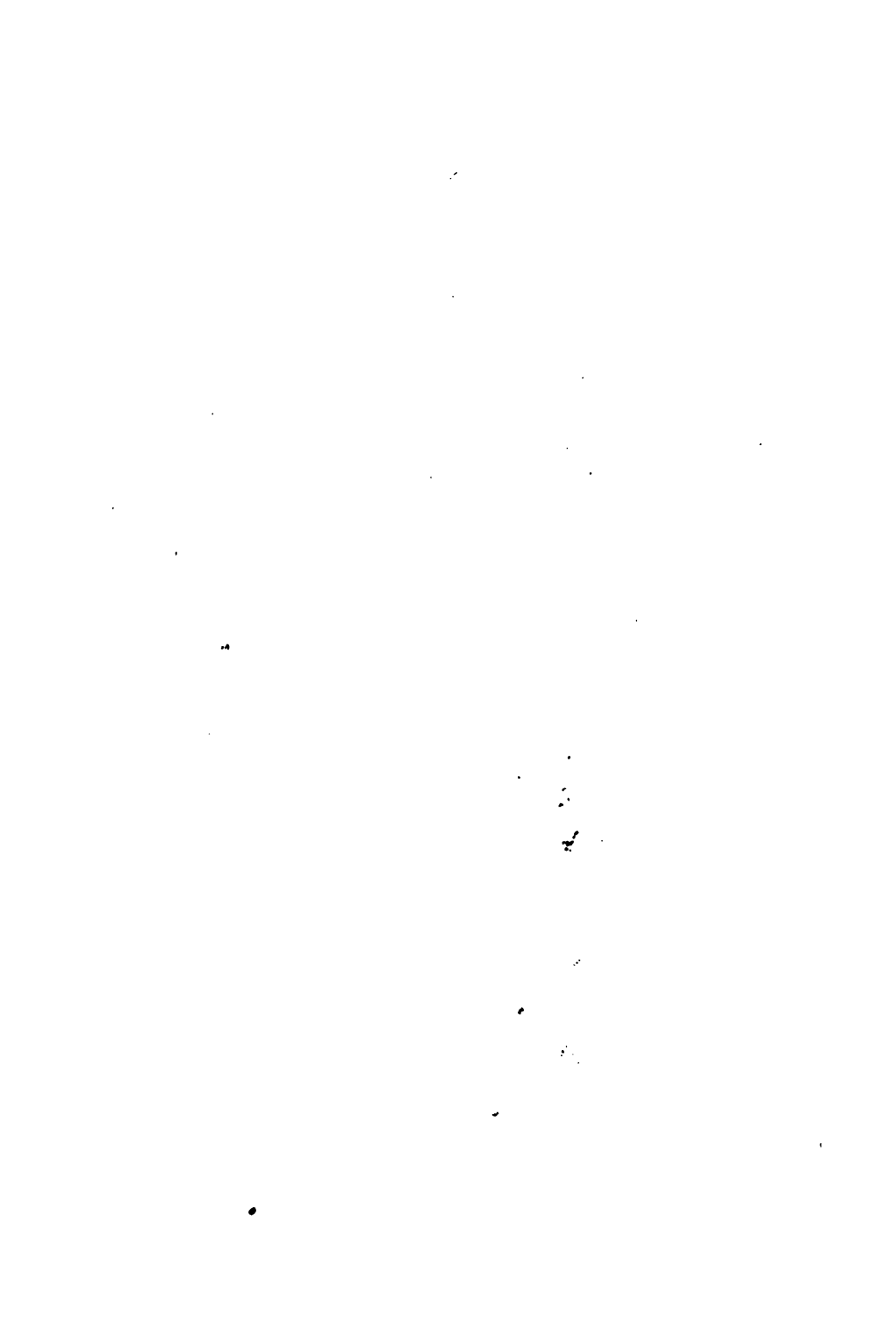






GEOFFREY'S WIFE.

VOL. II.



GEOFFREY'S WIFE.

A Reminiscence.

By STANLEY HOPE.



IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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ERRATA.

Vol. II. Page 30, line 14, *for* "eyes my" *read* "my eyes."

Vol. II. Page 192, line 21, *for* "combes" *read* "coombes."

Vol. II. Page 315, line 5, *for* "they are" *read* "it is,"

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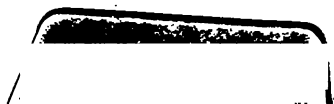
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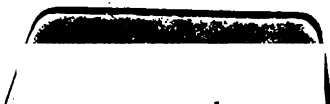


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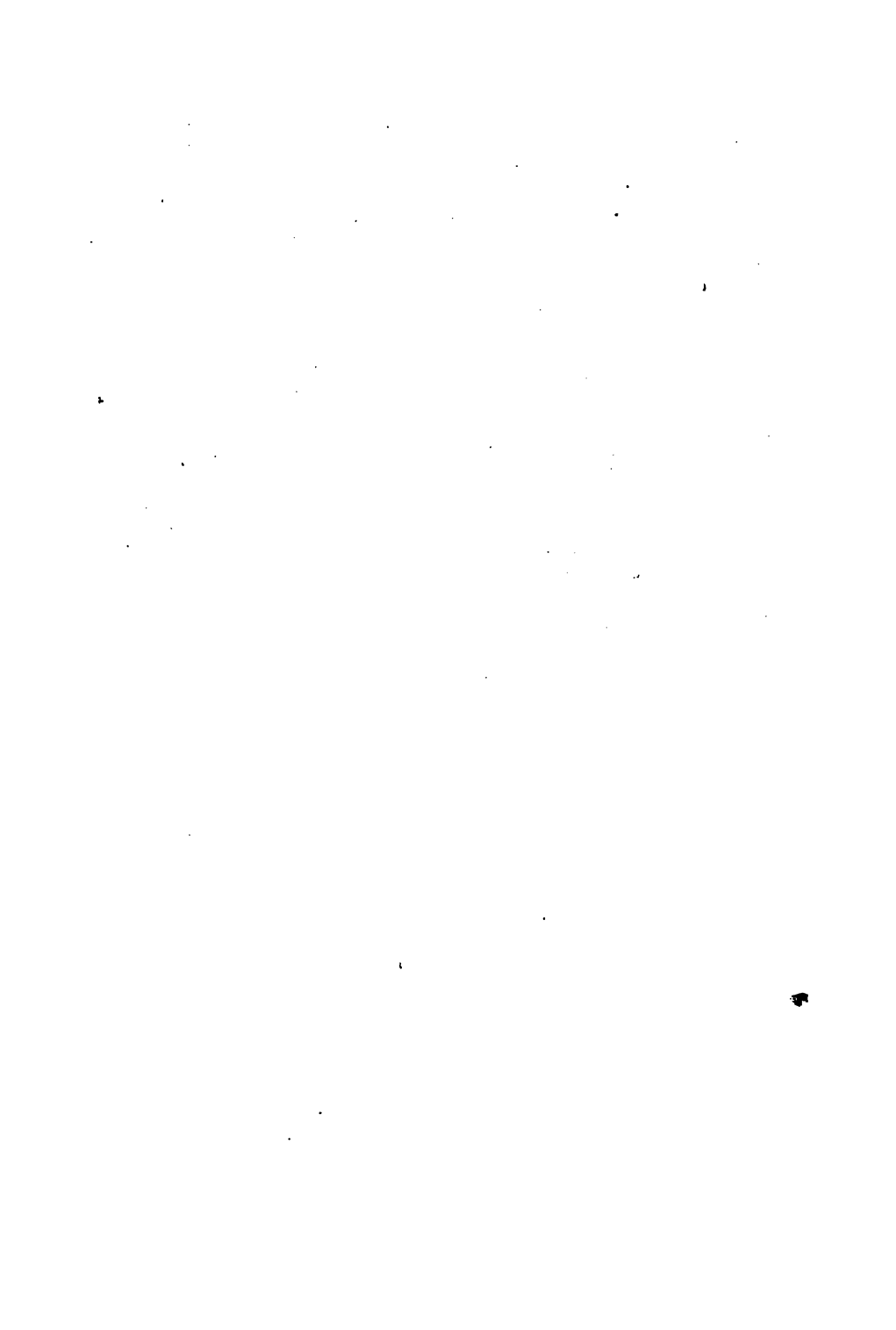
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GEOFFREY'S WIFE.

VOL. II.

morning he was alarmed at my appearance. The faithful fellow, proud of his master's success, had been reading the morning papers, and he naturally concluded that the excitement had been too much for me. It was fortunate I had this excuse to fall back upon. It was useful to me, also, as a reason for not seeing several political friends, who came to congratulate me and to talk over future events. How utterly distasteful every allusion to this topic now was, may be imagined. To relieve her in some way was now the sole object of my life. Every other consideration sank into utter insignificance, and to this one object my whole heart and soul should be devoted. On this I was quite determined.

All that day I remained in the same hopeless state. My garrulous servant, who seemed to feel a reflected honour in my triumph, informed me that my speech was the talk of the whole town, that the papers were overflowing with the highest eulo-

giums, and that a most brilliant future was predicted for me. I turned from the thought with a loathing I hardly cared to conceal. It was the darkest day of my life, notwithstanding all my previous pangs; for now remorse for the suffering I had brought on her who was so inexpressibly dear to me, was added to the grief of my separation from her. In the course of the day an urgent "whip" was sent three times underlined, requesting members to be in their places that night "without fail." I threw it aside as so much waste paper.

In the afternoon Dudley Grey arrived, and would not be denied. He came up to my room, where I was seated by the fire wrapped in a dressing-gown.

"What on earth is the matter, Holford?" he exclaimed. "Why, you look thoroughly washed out; with a couple of lines as black as ink round your eyes. Come, come, man! you'll never do for political life if you don't take things more quietly. After such a grand

coup as yours, you ought to be in the seventh heaven!"

I found it was vain to attempt to deceive him.

"The fact is, Grey, I have had a great shock. I can't explain to you what it is; but it has fairly knocked me over for the present."

Dudley Grey was of a thoroughly sympathetic nature, although it was, to a certain extent, hidden by his light manner and exuberance of animal spirits.

"I am very sorry indeed to hear it. It is hard that you should be worried at this critical point in your career; but forgive my saying that you are adopting the very worst course under the circumstances — sitting here moping over the fire. Rouse yourself, and come down to the House. You may be wanted there by-and-by."

I shook my head. "No," I replied; "it is out of the question to-day."

"But you really must not desert us. There

is a rumour afloat that the Ministers may not resign after all; and it is difficult to say what course events may take. It will look like deserting your party if you don't come. What will be thought of it, after your success of last night? You have, of course, seen the papers?"

"Not one."

"Then let me advise you to look at them. It will do you a world of good to see what a celebrity you have become. We shall rely on you to-night. The fact is, if they go out, we shall both be asked to take office."

"That I must distinctly decline. I have been so short a time in the House, that it would make the older members furious. It is all very well for you; it would be most unbecoming in me."

"You may rely upon it all that has been taken into consideration; they say they can't do without you. You're in for an Under-Secretaryship at least, Holford. But we are anticipating. Mind, I shall expect

you in your place to-night. I'm half a mind to say I won't leave you, but make you come down with me."

"I'll compromise matters with you. Leave me in peace, if possible. If they don't resign, and there is likely to be an important division, send for me, and I'll promise to come."

"That's right; I won't exact any more. Remember the old aphorism, 'the great obstacle to overcome in grief is the pleasure we feel in indulging in it.' There, I won't bother you any more, but shall hope to see you by-and-by, whether you are wanted or not—adieu!"

With a warm shake of the hand he left me. I felt an unconquerable repugnance to enter upon the excitement of political events with this weight of lead upon my heart, and I was fortunately spared the trial. Early in the evening a note arrived from Grey.

"The Ministers have resigned," he wrote. "You will not be wanted to-night; but pray

rouse yourself, and come to the Carlton, if possible; we want to talk over matters."

I was thankful for the relief this afforded me. My mind was still so distracted as to the course I was to take in the miserable business which had so prostrated me, that I could think of nothing else. All that evening I sat revolving projects in my mind, each one of which seemed utterly futile, and was cast aside as soon as formed. I was thoroughly worn out in mind and body; and, long after I retired to rest, I lay tossing about in so wretched a state that I felt alarmed lest some serious physical consequences might ensue. At length, towards morning, a merciful relief came to my exhausted frame. I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep; and my servant, knowing what a restless day I had passed, and thinking me seriously indisposed, very judiciously let me sleep on far into the next day. "Tired Nature's sweet restorer" exercised her usual salutary effect in this case, and I awoke,

feeling refreshed and invigorated, and better able to cope with the wretched feelings that came thronging back to me the moment I opened my eyes.

"Will you have your letters, sir?" Carter inquired, when he brought me my coffee.

"No; let them remain for the present." Then, with a sudden impulse, I added, "Stay; I think I will have them; bring them up at once."

By a sort of instinct I seemed to know what was to happen. Almost the first letter my eyes lighted on was one from Mrs. Lumley. I could scarcely conceal my impatience until Carter left the room.

"Don't let me be interrupted again until I ring," I said.

"Very well, sir."

My hand shook so that I could hardly open the envelope. She wrote as follows :—

"MY DEAR MR. HOLFORD,

"You once said to me, on an occasion which I must always remember, that if I were

ever in any trouble or difficulty you would be my true friend. I little thought at that time how soon I should require that friendship; but the letter which my husband tells me he has sent you, will have conveyed to you some idea of what my suffering is at present. It is indeed a most bitter trial. It has so utterly prostrated me that I scarcely know what I am doing; and although I cannot see how you can help me, I must give vent to the terrible feelings in my heart by writing these few lines to you. Some explanation is absolutely due to you, for I know how much you must be suffering. The most fearful accusations have been brought against me; and it is the bitter injustice of these accusations, after all my struggles, which makes them so hard to bear. How little I imagined, when you so kindly warned me against those two who seem plotting to bring about my ruin, of what depths of treachery they were capable! Alas, it is now too late! Every action appears to have been watched, and the most exaggerated and infamous con-

struction has been put upon the simplest and most innocent acts in both of us. Can you imagine my fate, still doomed to occupy the same house with these infamous creatures? I must do my husband the justice to say that I believe he has been so influenced by both, as to be quite incapable of forming a right judgment, and he has no doubt suffered greatly. Still, the cruel injustice he has been guilty of to me, fills me with indignation. He has offered to let me return home, at least for a time, but forbids me to take dear little Ethel; and how is it possible for me to leave my darling child at the mercy of these creatures? Alas! I know not what to do or where to turn for help and advice. I feel, too, that I am only adding to your trouble by inflicting mine on you; but I know you will forgive me when you see the terrible position in which I am placed. Oh! if I could only see you, and gain some counsel and comfort from you; but that is now impossible. I dare not even ask you to answer

this, but it has at least relieved my heart a little to tell you all."

"Oh, if I could only see you!" Those heart-wrung words rang in my ears as I finished the letter. One of those sudden impulses, which I suppose belong to my nature, came upon me at this moment, and I resolved that in some way she should see me, and, if possible, that very night. I could form no idea how it was to be accomplished, but accomplish it I would—that I was determined. This decision, after all the long hours of perplexity I had passed, seemed to give me new vitality. I rose hastily, and commenced dressing with quite a feeling of lightness about my heart, compared with what I had endured for so many weary hours. Carter was astonished when I again rang for him, and congratulated me on my improved looks.

"It's a wonderful good thing you're better, sir, for you're wanted very bad. Mr. Grey was here before you was awake this morning,

and said you was to meet him at the club as soon as ever you was well enough to leave the house."

"I'm sorry I can't do it, Carter. I'm going out of town to-day. I will leave a note for you to take to Mr. Grey; and if any one should call, you must say my return is uncertain. I may be back to-morrow, and I may be detained some days."

Carter looked astonished. "Excuse me, sir, but do you think you are quite strong enough? I beg your pardon for saying so, sir, but you was looking awful bad yesterday."

"It's for that very reason I'm going, Carter. The change will do me good. In fact, I feel better already from the very idea of the thing. Keep all my letters until my return, and if any one calls, say simply I am out of town."

"You don't wish me to go with you, sir?"

"No; there is no need. Let my bag be packed at once—a small one. I shall leave at one o'clock."

From this moment, through all the scenes that followed in the next twenty-four hours, a mysterious impulse moved me, which I can neither describe nor explain—a determination to gain my end at all risks and at any cost. The feeling left no room for despondency; I was full of life and energy, and though deeply impressed with the circumstances which called me forth, I never once flagged or wavered in my fixed resolve.

An hour or two later I was again flying onward in the very train which had conveyed me westward the day before my address to the electors of Tarringford. How light-hearted and full of happiness I had been that day! The pleasant breath of early summer was all around me then; the fields were green, the sky without a cloud, the skylark singing in the air. Now the bitter winter blasts flew by as we swept along at express speed, driving the rain in gusts against the glass, and chilling me to the bone in spite of furs and wraps. The whole

aspect of life seemed changed. When would another change come, bringing relief to her and me? I did not dare to think.

It was dark when I reached the little station nearest the Hall. The rain still came down in torrents, and the wind swept by the small station-house with a force that threatened to lift it bodily from its foundations. Thoroughly muffled up, and with my bag in my hand, I passed out of the station-gate unobserved. There was a small inn about a hundred yards from the line on the road to the Hall. It was seldom frequented by any one going or coming from there, and I knew I should be quite safe from recognition.

On inquiry, I found I could obtain a bed; and, for formality's sake, I ordered some dinner, and sat down in what was dignified by the name of the coffee-room—the only sitting-room, in fact, apart from the tap-room, of which the house could boast.

I had no more notion than an infant what

my course of proceedings would be. I was still led by the impulse of each succeeding moment, and purposely avoided deciding upon anything until I had dispatched my meal and was left alone to reflect. The fare the good woman of the house set before me was of the simplest description, and within an hour from my arrival I was only too glad to have the table cleared and to settle myself by the fire to think.

One of those coincidences, common to all of us at times, happened just at this moment, and decided my course for me. I had just drawn my chair to the fire, when the sound of wheels in the road attracted my attention, and a man's voice was heard immediately after calling to the landlord in a somewhat peremptory manner for a glass of beer. Something in the tone of the voice excited my curiosity, and I went to the window. In the dim light, I could just make out the face of the coachman from the Hall, who was seated alone in the familiar dog-cart

drinking the glass of beer which had just been handed to him.

"What brings you in to-night, then?" asked the landlord, as he counted the change of the shilling the coachman had tendered in payment.

"Only the master and Mr. Cunnyngname coming back by the eight train—and I wish they'd picked out a better night for their journey. Quiet, Bess!" he added, as the handsome mare he drove pawed impatiently to resume the journey; "you'll have to wait a quarter of an hour at the station if you don't here, so you may as well bide still, my lass."

"Why didn't you bring a close trap?" demanded the landlord; "they'll get a brave soaking afore they reach the Hall."

"You're right there; but I should have got a pretty blowing up if I had. Master hates to be shut up inside a carriage; he don't mind the weather, bless you, not he."

"Coming from town?" again inquired the other.

"No; only from a couple of days' hunting on the moor. I wish I was him—plenty of tin, a handsome wife, and no bothers; that's the sort of life for me. Good night, Bowden."

He gave the impatient mare her head, and she sprang off with a bound towards the station.

"He must have started on this hunting expedition immediately after dispatching his letter to me," I reflected, as I returned to the fire. "Troubles fly off him like water from a duck's back." Then came the picture of the wife during these past two days. Alone in the house with a woman she abhorred, yet chained there by the love of her child. They would return then to-night, and I——

Suddenly I started up as a thought flashed into my mind. Was it possible to reach the Hall before they returned? for then I could be sure of an interview whatever events might follow. I looked at my watch. No; it was not possible. The train was due in

eighteen minutes, and even if I could procure a trap, which was doubtful, I could not hope to reach the Hall sooner than the thoroughbred which drew the dog-cart. I turned to the window with a sigh. The clouds had lifted a little, and a few stars were peering out between the light masses of cloud-wrack which flew rapidly across the sky.

Gradually my thoughts began to take definite form, and, by a kind of inspiration, my plan of proceeding flashed into my mind. See her that night I would at all hazards. I hastily threw on my heavy overcoat and proceeded to the bar. The portly landlord was there alone, sitting by the fire in a sort of half doze.

"The weather is clearer," I said. "I am anxious to see a friend in this neighbourhood, and may be late. You can let me in, I suppose, if I'm not back before your usual time for closing?"

"Well, sir, me and my missus is bad hands

at setting up ; but Joe don't mind it, and he can let you in whatever time you like."

"Very well ; I dare say I sha'n't be very late."

I buttoned my coat closely round me, and drew a wrapper round my neck. A thick, heavy walking-stick, with a formidable knob, stood in the corner of the bar.

"Can you lend me this?" I asked, taking it in my hand.

"Oh, ay, ay ; take 'un, and welcome," was the reply. He was only half awake now, and, to my great relief, seemed but little interested in my proceedings.

I drew my travelling-cap tightly on my head, and went out into the cold, dark night, setting my steps towards the Hall.

CHAPTER XII.

"ONCE AGAIN."

It still wanted ten minutes to the arrival of the train, and in these parts trains were generally late, so that I calculated on being some distance on my way before the dog-cart overtook me. Not that I cared much for this. I knew they must pass me somewhere, and it was immaterial where, as I trusted to chance with regard to finding some means of remaining unobserved.

The rain was beating in my face, and the road for the greater part of the way was up-hill; but I held on stoutly, inspired by a feeling of dogged determination which would have carried me through far greater difficulties than I expected to encounter.

Every part of the road was familiar, and I contrasted my present mission with my former ones with a pain at my heart which it was impossible wholly to dispel. Still, when I asked myself the question whether, if I could undo all the bitter experiences of the past year, I should be willing to do so, the answer was emphatically in the negative. If I could do good to her, I should be willing to endure far more than I had already endured; and indeed, apart from this thought, I felt that she had done so much good to me in the way she had helped to expand my inner nature, that this thought alone enabled me to endure all my present suffering.

I had accomplished about half the distance to the Hall, and was just reaching the crest of a steep hill, when I heard the sound of wheels approaching rapidly behind. It was necessary to decide upon some course of action. I shrank from the idea of concealing myself, and I resolved to put a bold face on the matter and trust to the darkness and

their ignorance of my presence to prevent any recognition. There was a gate leading into a field in the high bank which rose on my right hand, standing somewhat elevated above the road. I turned on one side, and leaning my back against the gate, awaited their approach. The sound of the wheels almost ceased at this moment, and I concluded they had drawn rein at the bottom of the hill to breathe the mare up the steep ascent. My surmise was correct, for presently I heard the wheels approaching slowly, and distinctly heard Lumley's voice speaking in an excited tone.

There was a sudden lull in the storm, as if the wind were about to shift; the rain ceased, and a dead silence, broken only by the dripping of the rain-drops from leaf to leaf, pervaded the night-air.

The dog-cart drew near, so that I could dimly discern its outline and the three figures in it—Lumley and Cunnyngname in front, and the servant on the hind seat.

"There, it's no good brooding over it!" I heard Cunnyngghame say; "the mischief's done, and can't be helped; but I don't even now know how it happened."

"Why, the infernal swampy ground prevented the poor brute taking off properly, and she came down a cropper, right across the fence, with a stake in her flank. They'll have to shoot her. That's the second I've lost within a year—just my luck!"

"Well, don't worry yourself about it; it's no good crying over spilt milk."

"Oh, it's all very fine for you—you don't care what I lose."

"*Prenez garde,*" said Cunninghame quickly, as if to remind his companion of the servant behind, whose presence he seemed to have overlooked. "By the way, have you had an answer from town?" he added.

"No, and am not likely to; I don't think we shall be troubled much more in that quarter."

Cunnyngghame laughed a little malicious

laugh, which made me grasp my heavy stick more tightly.

"No, I expect the shot went home," he said, with another chuckle.

They were now almost abreast of me, As the country fell away behind the gate, and the latter was a few feet higher than the road, my figure, from where they were, must have stood out in relief against the sky. I was conscious of this, and made no effort to hide myself.

"Who the devil's that!" exclaimed Cun-nyngame, first catching sight of me — "a strapping fellow, at all events."

"You've chosen a dark night for your walk, my friend," said Lumley. Then, with a rough good nature, and seeing, I suppose, that I was in a civilised garb, he added, "Will you ride?"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Cunnyngame abruptly; "the roads are heavy enough in all conscience, without having four in the trap; get on, Lumley."

It was fortunate I was not called on to respond. The mare sprang away at a fast trot, and they were soon out of sight, leaving me with a tingling of the veins and a desire to bring my stick into active operation, such as I had seldom felt before.

I pursued my way rapidly. I knew that by crossing a small field and leaping a low wall and ditch I could gain the grounds without passing the lodge, and so obtain access to the garden by an iron gate in the fence separating it from the pastures.

It was nine o'clock when I reached the shrubberies. I followed the well-known path where I had walked with her on that never-to-be-forgotten morning of my departure. How little I then knew under what strange circumstances it would be again revisited! It seemed like the wildest romance to me, and yet here I was in absolute bodily presence! It was yet early to carry out the plan upon which I was now bent, and I sat for some time on a garden-seat where I had sat with

her a score of times in those happy days of our first acquaintance, which seemed to me, on looking back, like some bright heaven that had passed away for ever. Would such a happy time ever come again? It seemed to me impossible.

Another half-hour passed. I went round to the side of the house where the billiard-room was situated. All was darkness there at present. I was just turning away, when a light gleamed through the windows and there was a sound of voices within. Then the door was thrown open. I stepped quickly on one side. "I am not ready for you *yet*," I thought, "but shall be by-and-by."

Lumley took a step outside the door.

"A fine night, Dick," he said to his friend inside. "It's come over quite sultry for the time of year. Get the balls; I'll play you five hundred up for a sovereign."

I heard Dick mutter something in reply, which I interpreted into dissatisfaction with

the stakes. Lumley returned to the room, closing the door, and then I heard the click of the balls, and knew the game had commenced.

I could not restrain the beating of my heart as I retraced my steps to the part of the lawn beneath the window of the boudoir. As I reached it a light gleamed within, and I knew that she was there.

Her heart-wrung cry, "Oh, if I could but see you!" came back to me. I was no hero of romance, but a weak man, tossed by a passion which had been held in leash for many months, but which had now broken down all self-control. She was there, almost within my reach, in an agony of grief which I felt that I alone could soothe. I could no longer hesitate.

There was an ilex-oak at the end of the balcony stretching close up to the rails. I sprang into the branches, and catching the projection of the balcony with my hand, drew myself up at once, and stood upon the bal-

cony itself. Then I passed rapidly along to the ante-room window.

A heavy stand of plants stood immediately opposite. I drew it forward as noiselessly as I could, and placed it close against the window. "There, madam," I said, with a vivid remembrance of Miss Kean, "if you are inclined for any prying to-night, you must overcome that obstacle first." Then I returned to the window of the boudoir.

There was a slight space between the blind and the side of the window-frame, through which I could see into the room. I raised eyes my and saw her once again.

The remembrance of that moment comes over me now with a thrill which makes me hold my hand and pause in my task of recording it. She was seated by the fire in an easy-chair, her head resting on her hand, and with a wan, worn look which went to my very heart.

Without hesitation I tapped lightly at the pane. She started up with an alarmed look

—her eyes fixed in a wild, questioning way upon the window. I tapped again.

A light seemed to break over her face. Its terror vanished. She came rapidly towards me, drew aside the blind, and in an instant threw open the window.

In another moment my arms were folded about her in a long, clinging embrace. All the tender woman was uppermost now. She hung upon my breast without a word. I put back the hair from her forehead, and showered kisses—impassioned, burning kisses—on her cheek, her lips, and on her poor pale brow; kisses that lifted the dreary weight from my long pent-up love and held me in a delicious trance.

Suddenly she started back. "Oh! no, no, no!" she said; "this must not be; but God be thanked that I see you once more!"

She took my hand and led me to a seat near the fire and sat down beside me.

"I have so longed—so prayed for this," she went on. "I have been so wretchedly

ill and miserable since that awful day when he told me, and I have felt so utterly dependent on you. But I *knew* you would come—I felt that you were near me; and now it seems as if such a weary load were lifted from my heart. Oh, I trust I am not very wicked, but I have felt so terribly alone!”

Her hand nestled into mine again, and I held it there while we talked.

“I am come to help you to-night,” I said.

“You have done that already by your presence,” she replied. “I feel stronger, braver, better. I have done nothing but think and think till brain and heart seemed wrung. Oh, if I could but get away from this place!”

“That is what I have come to help you to do.”

She looked at me in surprise, not understanding my meaning.

“I mean that I shall compel them to let you go,” I said.

"I am free to do that now; but I cannot leave my child, whatever happens."

"You shall take her with you."

She shook her head incredulously. "You do not know his nature — how immovable he is with every one but that horrible man."

"No matter; I do not wish to raise false hopes, but I think I can bring an argument to bear upon him by-and-by which will compel him to give way."

A look of terror came back to her face. "You do not mean to see him?" she hurriedly exclaimed.

"Indeed, I do; and to exact conditions respecting you which will rescue you from this miserable life you are now leading."

"Oh, you must not!" she cried. "Indeed, you must not—the result will be fearful!"

"Come, come!" I replied; "you alarm yourself without a cause. I am here this night for the sole purpose of helping you, and rely upon it my actions will be based

upon a tolerably firm foundation. I shall run no risks in connection with your interests and happiness."

"How good you are to me! But I cannot understand you. How is it possible that you can influence him by your arguments, when he is unmoved by the wretched position in which I have been placed?"

"You must not ask me to explain. One day, perhaps, you may know all. For the present, you must be content to know that I can bring an argument to bear upon him which I hope and believe must succeed."

"Oh, if I could only think that, what a relief it would be to me!"

"The condition I shall exact," I went on, "will be that you are free to leave, with dear little Ethel, whenever you please, and to remain away as long as these people are in the house."

"It will be too great a happiness. You do not know all I have undergone. How I have hated them both, although I have

endeavoured to hide it, for the sake of my husband! I would have done anything to fulfil my duty to him; but when that fearful accusation came, I could be submissive no longer, and my only desire was to get away."

"Now, listen to me," I replied. "I must not linger here—for your sake, I must leave you now. Do not be alarmed for me—I have no fear for myself. Stay here at the window; and if my mission should succeed—as I am sure it will—I will come back to the lower terrace there, and wave my handkerchief twice. Be brave and strong, for my sake."

I rose from my chair; and we moved towards the window. Both were conscious that we might never meet again—that the very weakness to which we had yielded was in itself a barrier which rose up between us and the future. I took her dear face between my hands.

"All good angels bless and guard you, my darling!" I said.

She did not reply—her lips moved, but no words came. I placed her gently in a chair, and said—

“Stay there—let me leave you so. I must be strong if I would fight your battle, and—this is almost more than I can bear.”

Her head sank down heavily upon the table by her side—I dared not pause. I stepped hastily through the window, and closed it behind me. The night-breeze, which had sprung up again, blew cold upon my throbbing temples. I stood a moment to recover myself—for my mind seemed wavering—and then, without looking back, passed hastily along the balcony, and, grasping the branches of the ilex, swung myself on to the lawn below.

For some minutes I remained motionless on the grassy slope. Nothing more unendurable than this parting could befall me; and an utter feeling of stagnation and indifference as to what might follow in the interview I had determined to effect came

over me. I stepped across the lawn towards the billiard-room without the slightest quickening of the pulse, or the least feeling of emotion. The lights were still there; and I heard Lumley's voice inside. Without a moment's hesitation, I knocked at the door.

There was silence for a few seconds, and then Lumley demanded who was there.

"It is I, Holford!" I replied. "Will you be good enough to let me in?"

There was an exclamation of surprise from within; and then footsteps advanced to the door. It was thrown open, and Lumley stood in the doorway.

"What do you mean by coming here in this way, like a thief in the night?" he asked.

"Because if I had demanded an interview beforehand, it would have been denied."

"You're right there—it would."

"Nevertheless, I have something to say to you to-night which you must hear. Let me pass."

He stood right across the doorway to bar my entrance. Cunnyngame called out in an angry voice—

“Don’t let him in, Geoffrey!—don’t let the fellow in! Infernal impudence, his coming here like this!”

“Let me recommend you not to take that advice,” I replied. “If you don’t let me in, you may regret it to the last day of your life.”

Something in my tone seemed to startle him.

“You can’t do us much harm one way or the other,” he said; “come in.”

He stepped aside. I passed at once into the room, crossed to the fireplace, and sat down deliberately in an easy-chair, holding my trusty stick in my hand.

We formed a strange trio. Cunnyngame sat in an arm-chair immediately opposite me on the other side of the fireplace, with a cigar between his lips—he always smoked Lumley’s best cigars—and he looked at me,

with his small, near-set eyes, pretty much as a snake looks at a strange intruder in his path.

Lumley had closed the door, and stood, with his cue in his hand, against the billiard-table, apparently wondering what was to happen; so we sat motionless for some seconds.

"Now then," Lumley exclaimed; "say what you've got to say, and let there be an end of it. You know well enough you've no business in this house."

"What I have come for to-night, is to talk to you about your wife," I said, quite calmly.

"If you dare to mention her name," he answered, with an oath, "I'll turn you out of the house!"

"You have tried the brute force argument before, Lumley," I replied; "it has no effect on me—though, even if it came to that, the issue might be uncertain. I am here to-night not to accept terms, but to dictate them."

"You take devilish high ground."

"And I mean to keep it."

"Oh! you do? Let's hear how you intend to go about it."

He gave a coarse laugh, as if he set me at defiance. The whole scene was inexpressibly painful to me. I had sat so often in that room as a welcome and honoured guest, had received so many little kindnesses from this very man, that even now my heart almost melted towards him; but the remembrance of that worn, pale face I had so lately left, and the foul imputation he had made, together with the sight of the villain opposite, who had incited it all, steeled my heart against them both.

"Lumley!" I resumed; "this is a painful ordeal for me to go through after all our past intercourse; but I do it in the interest of your wife, whose unwearying kindness and attention snatched me from the brink of the grave. I cannot sit still and see her suffer from the vilest of all imputations and not make an

effort to save her. I come to-night to request that she may be allowed to leave this house, and remain away as long as these people are in it."

"Suppose I deny your right to make the request; and say, further, that I consider it confounded impudence in you even to mention her name?"

"In that case you must take the consequences, which, I promise you, will be serious."

My determined tone evidently impressed him, for he answered—


"Well, then, I will say this much: she is free to go whenever she likes."

"And take her child?"

"Most decidedly not."

"Of course he wants to get her away," struck in Cunnyngname, with a sneer; "we can easily understand why."

"Mr. Cunnyngname," I replied, looking full in his face, "I must trouble you not to interrupt my conversation with your friend."



Moreover, if you dare to give utterance to another such insinuation, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life."

I felt fairly roused, and he saw it, and cowered down into his chair. Then I turned to Lumley—

"It is no good bandying words; I must make Ethel's departure a condition."

"Which I flatly refuse."

"Why?"

"If you will have an answer, it is this: if my wife goes alone, people will know I have cause of complaint; if she takes the child, they will say I am in fault, and *that* I don't choose to admit."

"Then, as I said before, you must be prepared for the consequences. I have but to telegraph to a certain detective, whom Mr. Cunnyngname may remember, to bring the law to bear upon him at once. Within twenty-four hours he will be lodged in prison."

I moved towards the door, opened it, and

passed out. As I did so, I heard Cunnyng-hame say, in a low, quick voice—

"For God's sake don't let him go, Geoffrey!"

Lumley stepped after me. "Stop a bit, Holford. Let's discuss this matter quietly."

I came back into the room, and stood with my back to the door. "I have no time for discussion; I simply want your answer—yes or no?"

"Let the brat go, Geoffrey," said Cunnyng-hame.

"What!" exclaimed Lumley, turning savagely upon him, "do you expect me to give up everything for you?"

"I don't see how you can help yourself. If he carries out his threat it's as bad for you as for me."

"Is this true?" I asked, turning to Lumley.

"Well, I don't suppose Dick would let me go scot-free. He's not much given to

mercy at the best of times," he added, with a grim laugh.

"And his exposure would involve you—"

"In ruin!" he struck in.

"And disgrace?"

"And disgrace!"

I drew a long breath. "I am deeply grieved to hear it," I said; "but even that will not stop me now." I turned to go once more.

"Confound you!—then have your own way!" he exclaimed.

"You promise to let her go, and take the child with her?"

"Yes. Now perhaps you will be good enough to take yourself off."

"Not just yet. There are one or two other conditions; but they are slight ones."

"Are you not satisfied yet?"

"A few minutes more and I have done. This is probably the last time we shall meet, and I must, therefore, trespass a little on your patience. Now you have made this concession I will say this much,

although the foul insinuations of your friend—in which you profess to believe—have excited my indignation to such an extent that I can scarcely bring myself to reply to them. It is sufficient for me that I have been able to repay Mrs. Lumley's kindness by helping her to escape from the painful position she has had to endure, but I shall never voluntarily meet her again—this you may rely on. I have only now to request—indeed, I make it a condition—that you do not, in your future intercourse with her, refer in any way to me or to this meeting. You will simply inform her that she is at liberty to go and to take Ethel with her."

"You may depend upon it I have not the slightest desire to mention your name," Lumley replied, with a sneer.

"Let that be understood then, and so long as my conditions are observed, you and your friend are safe. And now I have one very simple request to make."

"Well—what more?"

"I left a small note-book by accident in the upper drawer of your library table; if it be there still, I wish to have it."

"If you left it there, it is probably there still; you had better fetch it yourself."

He took from his pocket a bunch of keys and threw them on the billiard-table. I had long desired to re-possess myself of this note-book, for it was the one in which I had entered the copies of the two mysterious slips of paper I had found in first looking over the accounts. I lighted one of the bed-room candles on the side-table and left the room.

It seemed as if my heart-struggles were never to cease. What I felt as I pursued my way through those familiar rooms I will not attempt to describe! I had to pass the drawing-room where I had spent so many happy hours. There was the piano beside which I had stood a hundred times listening to the voice which seemed even

now lingering in my ears—the music and the old familiar songs lying upon the shelves of the whatnot—the bay window in which we had sat on that well-remembered night before the election. How it all came back to me! I dared not pause, but passed rapidly on with a choking sensation in my throat. I reached the library—full of so many memories of joy and pain—of the most intense joy and the most acute pain. I hastened to the table, opened the drawer, and found the book where I had left it. Hastily possessing myself of it, I returned to the library.

Cunnynghame had left the room, and Lumley stood, as before, half leaning against the table near the door. I took up my cap and passed at once into the porch. Not a word was exchanged, but, as I reached the terrace, he took one or two quick steps after me and said—

"Holford, I think after all I may have done you and my wife an injustice. I

am not quite so bad as I seem—shake hands.”

“How often,” I thought, “am I to melt towards this man?” I took the extended hand.

“You have driven an infernally hard bargain with me, but I’ll keep my word,” he said.

“And I mine,” I answered. “Good night.”

“I can’t ask you to stay here—you can’t expect it; but I suppose you have somewhere to go?”

“Oh, yes! don’t distress yourself about that. Good night.”

“Good night,” he answered, “and good-bye.”

He turned into the house and closed the door. I passed rapidly down to the lower terrace. In the dim light of the rising moon I could just make out Mrs. Lumley’s figure at the window of the boudoir. I waved my handkerchief twice.

She threw open the window, and, passing out on to the balcony, waved her hand in reply.

Again that inexpressible yearning to return to her came over me, but I knew the madness of the thought after what had passed. I felt, too, that the end had now come, and that she must feel it as well. I did not dare to look at her again, but turned hastily away and went on into the shadow of the trees.

I have often thought since that such anguish as I felt that night must atone for a long catalogue of sins in the eyes of Him to whom all hearts are open.

CHAPTER XIII.

PROSTRATE AT LAST.

I SUCCUMBED at last. The mental and bodily strain which I had undergone in the past twelve months proved too much for my strength, and for some weeks after my nocturnal visit to the Hall I lay in my chambers in London in a state of utter prostration. The whole nervous system seemed shaken. I was incapable of the slightest exertion, with the ever-present dread hanging over me, that my condition was but the forerunner of some worse state—either a complete break-up of the system, or a permanent derangement of the mental faculties.

The doctors were more seriously alarmed

than they would have been if they had some absolute disease to contend against. They knew that my condition had been caused by excessive mental anxiety, following quickly upon an accident which had almost cost me my life, though of the nature of that anxiety they were of course ignorant. The old recommendations of change of air and scene were of course prescribed; but for the present I was too weak to enter upon any arrangement with a view to carry out this advice. The only alleviation of my suffering arose from the fact that my senses were so dulled I could not think deeply; and, although the remembrance of all that had passed left me in a state of profound melancholy, still the suffering was not of that acute character which had caused me such intense pain when my mind and body were both in a state of health and activity.

On looking back, however, I seem to shrink from this period of my life more than from any other. The dull, lifeless state I was

then in appears to me now more dreadful to contemplate than even the period of more active suffering.

My chief, I may say my only real comforter through all this dreary time, was my friend, Dudley Grey. Although he was immersed in important business almost from morning till night—having, as I anticipated, accepted office when the Conservatives took the reins of government—he scarcely ever failed to pay me a visit at some period of the day; and I was always helped and cheered by his presence to an extent I hardly appreciated at the time.

My state of health was of course a sufficient excuse to my constituents for not appearing among them at Easter, as had been arranged; and, indeed, I was only too glad to be relieved from a task which I could not have undertaken, but which made me at the same time almost repent that I had ever entered upon duties which I seemed so little able to fulfil.

My troubles were, moreover, greatly aggravated by the thought that in all probability Mrs. Lumley must be aware of the state I was in, and I knew how much this would add to the grief she was already enduring. The prominent part I had taken in the House of course caused the public to interest themselves in my future, and the news of my being incapacitated from the pursuit of public duties by the state of my health found its way into the papers, and thus I feared must necessarily have reached the ears of one who I knew was only too solicitous concerning my welfare.

This utter prostration had come on so suddenly after my return to town, that my doctor had given strict orders for all letters and papers to be kept from me, so that my mind might remain quite undisturbed. This was, of course, a great responsibility for those about me to take upon themselves. They had, however, consulted Dudley Grey, and he had enjoined them to carry out the doctor's

directions, promising to take the responsibility upon himself.

As the lengthening days and bright spring weather chased away the winter gloom of the London streets, my spirits began to revive, until at length I was so far recovered that Grey handed to me the letters which had accumulated in considerable numbers during my illness. Among them I at once recognised one in the well-known handwriting of Mrs. Lumley.

Not until I was alone could I summon courage to open it, although I could pretty well guess the contents. It was dated some time back, and grievously did I lament that the mistaken zeal of my friends had kept from me what would have been so great a solace in my darker moments. It was written from her father's vicarage in North Devon.

"I feel that I must take an early opportunity of thanking you for what you have done for me," she wrote. "It is quite impossible to describe the relief it has been.

It has made me feel quite a different creature. A weight seems lifted from my heart, and but for the presence of one enduring sorrow, which it would be affectation to hide from you, I could almost fancy that the dear old days had come back again. I have told my dearest father *all*, and his kind sympathetic nature has prevented his judging me harshly. It is with his knowledge that I am writing to you this once. How I think of you and all your goodness to me, and pray for your success in everything you undertake, I need not tell you. I cannot yet bring myself to face the future calmly, but strength, I hope, may come soon both to you and to me. I dare not trust myself to say more, but I pray that every blessing may attend you now and at all times. Ethel sends her love to her old friend-and favourite."

"Thank heaven, I have brought at least some amount of peace to her!" I exclaimed, as I folded up the letter and placed it in my writing-case. I felt so comparatively

light-hearted, that, when Grey drove down to see me that afternoon, I presented such an improved appearance that he pressed me to come out for a long country drive.

The fine weather, the air, and the rapid motion produced their usual effect, and so for several successive days my kind friend came at the same hour and insisted on my taking a long round with him.

My frame soon began to recover its tone, and my faculties to revive. I began even to feel a desire for that change of scene which the doctors so strongly recommended; and at length resolved that I would start for the Continent, and carry out a scheme which had several times presented itself to my mind, but which had never yet taken any definite form.

It will be remembered that on one of the slips of paper which I had found in the library table at the Hall, a certain address in Brussels was given from which Cunyng-hame had written. This address I had copied

in the note-book accidentally left behind. It was now again in my possession, and I felt that under the circumstances I was quite justified in endeavouring to obtain from this clue some information concerning this suspicious person's earlier career, which might possibly lead to the discovery of the secret influence which he exercised over Lumley. "At any rate," I reflected, "there can be no harm in making the attempt."

A few days after I was sitting in my room, turning over this very subject in my mind, when the door suddenly opened and the servant announced Lady Barrington.

I sprang forward in the greatest delight—there was but one person in the world whose presence would have given me greater pleasure.

"My dear Lady Barrington, I am so charmed to see you!"

"And I to see you. I have been hoping to come before, but the fact is, Sir John has had such a severe attack of his old enemy,

the gout, that I have not been able to leave him for some days; besides, they told me you could not see any one."

"I should have been only too glad to see *you*, I assure you."

"Thanks; I shall remember that another time. We have been so sadly anxious about you since we saw the notice of your severe illness in the paper, and Sir John would have been up long ago had he been sufficiently well. It is a great relief to me to see you so much better. I know well enough what has brought on your attack, and no one can sympathise with you more deeply than I do, because I know how hard a fight you have had, and how well you have fought."

I could not reply. I returned the warm pressure of her hand, and felt I had indeed a friend in her.

"And now I am going to tell you something which I know will interest you. I have seen my dear little friend; she is so much brighter and happier that she does not look

like the same person. She tells me she is indebted to you for her release, though she would not tell me in what way; and indeed, if it is a secret, I am content not to know. I will not tell you how she speaks of you, or how her heart overflows with gratitude, because it is better for you not to know too much. You must be brave and strong, my good friend, and then, after a time, you will both overcome this unhappy passion."

I shook my head. "My dear Lady Barrington, I have no desire to give way to sentiment, but I cannot deceive myself so far as to suppose that this feeling will ever be overcome. That I shall learn to look upon it with comparative calmness after a time, I am willing to hope; but she is so thoroughly engrafted in my very nature that I can never cease to regard her in the same light as at this moment. I have never before met any woman who approached so near my idea of what a woman should be. It is impossible, therefore, that I can ever change."

"Come, come, my dear friend, I cannot allow you to talk in this strain; it is folly, and it is not right."

"But it is the truth, and I do not wish to deceive so kind a friend."

"I hope you never will, for both your sakes. But you must rouse yourself. You want change—excitement. You have gone through enough in the last year to kill some men."

"I feel that. I purpose leaving for the Continent next week, and shall be away a long time. But you have not told me the particulars now. When did she leave the Hall?"

"She went away very suddenly in February, even without seeing me. She wrote to me soon after, and told me that her husband had given her permission to go, and she thought she had better avail herself of it at once. Those people are still there, and Mr. Lumley shuts himself up a good deal and sees scarcely any one. Now his wife is gone, very few care to visit him."

"Is it supposed they are separated?"

"By no means; it is understood by every one about them that she is merely gone on a long visit to her father, who is in anything but good health;—and, by the way, that reminds me of a very important subject in which I want your help."

"Pray, let me hear it."

"Dear Ada's father has been a very hard-worked man for years, and has managed to exist all the time on a mere pittance—in fact, it is one of those parishes where there is excessively hard work and very little pay. There is a neighbouring living just vacant where the reverse is the case. It would be the greatest boon to her father if we could but get it for him, and I thought you might help me in the matter."

"In whose gift is the living?"

"In the Prime Minister's."

"Indeed! then I think I can help you, and I need not tell you what a delight it will be to me to do so."

"I am sure of that. I shall leave the

matter in your hands then. When do you think I shall hear from you?"

"To-morrow at the latest, I hope."

"Well, then, I shall rely on you; of course you will come and see us."

"I shall be charmed, when you are alone."

"That is almost always; for my poor dear husband is not fit to see many visitors."

"Do you remain long in town?"

"Oh, dear, no! We only came up to transact some business, and if Sir John had been well enough it would have been all settled by this time, and we should have flitted again. Now I must really say good-bye. I am writing to Ada—what shall I say from you?"

"Tell her how much I rejoice to think she is happier—that the intelligence has done more for me than anything else in the world could have done; it has given me new life and energy."

"My poor friend," Lady Barrington said, in a tone of deep emotion, "you are too sen-

sitive—you feel both joys and sorrows too acutely. What a pity it is you cannot bring yourself down to the matter-of-fact state of mind in which most people in your profession go through life! It would be much better for you, although I must confess I should not like you half as well. It does seem strange,” she added, after a moment’s pause, “that two people so exactly fitted for each other, like you and Ada, should have been thrown together under such perfectly hopeless circumstances—thrust upon each other by a kind of irresistible fate. It is a strange, inexplicable decree of Providence; the why and the wherefore may all be made plain one day. But I must not indulge in this strain. Remember Longfellow’s words: ‘Look not mournfully into the Past—it comes not back again. Wisely improve the Present—it is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy Future without fear and with a manly heart.’ Let those noble words be engraven on your memory, my good friend, for her

sake, and for your own—and, may I add, for mine?"

"You may indeed," I answered; "I don't know what we should have done without you."

"Thank goodness, then, my life is not all useless! But I must really say good-bye. Now set to work at once, and endeavour to secure this living for her father—that will do you good, I'm convinced! Work, work! it is the panacea for all earthly ills, if people would but believe it. Good-bye."

She left me, and I felt that she had brought health to me, mentally and physically. Such a friend was rarely to be found; one who combined, as she did, good sound sense with rare sympathies and the divine gift of charity. I turned to my writing-table and dispatched a note at once to the Premier respecting the vacant living, although, as it was near the time for the assembling of the House, I knew there was but little chance of my hearing until the

morning. At an early hour the next day the answer came.

“MY DEAR HOLFORD,

“I am, of course, overwhelmed with applications; but I consider you have the first claim on me. I have given the necessary instructions for your friend to be inducted to the living. I hope you are better, and that we shall soon see you amongst us again.”

How heartily I rejoiced at my success may easily be conceived. I lost not a moment in calling on Lady Barrington, to convey to her the pleasant intelligence. She was as much rejoiced as I was. The conviction I had entertained that my labours would result in some positive benefit to Mrs. Lumley was beginning to be realised, and my spirits rose proportionably.

I left Lady Barrington to convey the gratifying intelligence to her, and imme-

diately set about preparing for my foreign trip. Grey came in in the afternoon, and was astonished at the change for the better which he observed in my appearance and demeanour.

"I'll tell you what, Holford," he said; "you've been more on my mind than you have any idea of. A man who has no relations and won't make new friends is rather a hopeless sort of animal to deal with. I was almost giving you up at one time; you seemed so obstinately determined to make yourself miserable."

"I am obstinately determined to make myself happy now, at any rate. Don't be alarmed, but I intend starting for the Continent to-morrow. I wish you could go with me."

"I heartily wish I could; but that is impossible under present circumstances. However, it's about the best thing you can do. I shall expect to see you as strong as a horse when you come back, and ready to

take the House by storm. Now come and have a turn in the park; it is but right you should look upon the face of your fellow-man once more before you disappear from London life."


CHAPTER XIV.

ADIEU, MY NATIVE SHORE!

THE evening of the following day found me in Brussels. The weather had been lovely, and I felt full of vigour, and most anxious to prosecute my inquiries respecting that mysterious slip of paper.

The next morning I proceeded at an early hour to the Rue de Commerce. It was not without a considerable amount of anxiety that I knocked at the door of No. 50.

The neat French servant who opened the door informed me, in answer to my inquiry, that the house was an English boarding-establishment, and that her mistress was at home. I was shown up to a well-furnished



drawing-room, and after waiting a short time, the lady of the house made her appearance. I found she was an English-woman, and this I hoped would somewhat facilitate the object I had in view.

I apologised for calling, and informed her that I was most anxious to obtain some information respecting a gentleman who had been staying in the house some five years ago.

She stopped me at once, expressing her great regret that she was unable to furnish me with the requisite information. She had only been resident there for three years; her predecessor, of whom she had purchased the goodwill of the house, having left Brussels some time ago.

"Do you know her present address?" I asked.

"I believe she is in Antwerp, but I am not quite sure of the address—stay, I think I have a card of hers somewhere."

She went to a side-table and began searching among the papers in the drawer.

"This is fortunate," she said, selecting a card from a number of others. "Here is her card—'Madame Conneau, 27, Place de Mier, Anvers;' you can take it if you wish to find her."

"Thank you. Can you tell me if she was living here at the time I named—five years ago?"

"Oh, yes; I believe so. She had been here several years. I don't know what induced her to leave. She was not very successful here, and perhaps thought to better herself."

I thanked my informant, and said "good morning." An hour after I was on my way to Antwerp, and on my arrival went at once to the address which had been given to me.

"Can I see Madame Conneau?" I inquired of the domestic who made her appearance at the door.

"There is no one of that name here," was the reply.

"But I have her card with this address—see."

"Ah! Yes, I remember, monsieur; I will ask my mistress."

She hurried up-stairs. Presently she returned, followed by a staid, elderly-looking woman, whom I took to be the mistress.

"Madame Conneau is no longer here, I am told?"

"No, indeed, monsieur; she left very suddenly six months ago."

"And her present address?"

"I do not know; she did not leave any."

"What was the cause of her sudden departure?"


The good woman shrugged her shoulders and raised her eyebrows.

"It is not for me to say; I believe she was not successful in business."

"And you have no idea of her address?"

"None whatever; many would be glad to know."

Again I was defeated. This time I felt the disappointment keenly, for it left me no hope of being able to prosecute my inquiries.



I proceeded to the post-office, but I could gain no information there, nor at the neighbouring shops and hotels. Utterly dispirited, I returned to Brussels by an evening train. There was positively no course open to me but to relinquish the task for a time at least, and trust to chance to give me some further clue at a future time. The idea had of course occurred to me of obtaining information from Dawkins, the detective; but in doing this, I of course saw that I should be tacitly admitting Cunnyngghame's guilt, and I could then have no excuse for shielding him. Before giving it up, however, I determined to advertise for the missing Madame Conneau. I inserted in the principal Belgian papers, in *Galignani*, and in the *Times*, an advertisement to the effect that if Madame Conneau, who, in the year 18—, was living in the Rue de Commerce, Brussels, would communicate with me at the Hôtel Bellevue, Brussels, she would hear of something to her advantage. I had no hesita-

tion in saying this; for if I could have found her, and obtained any information, I should have been only too happy to reward her liberally; and it appeared, from all I could gather, that she was not one who would be likely to refuse an offer of this kind.

Three weeks passed away, but nothing resulted from my advertisements. During that time, however, I received a letter from Lady Barrington, telling me that she had herself conveyed the good news about the living to Mrs. Lumley and her father. It was impossible to describe, she said, the joy it had caused, and her dear little friend was overflowing with gratitude to me for what I had done. In conclusion, she urged me strongly to start on some distant expedition, which would divert my thoughts and fill my mind with new ideas. "Get a pleasant companion, if you can," she said; "but in any case—go. It will be better for Ada as well. I can easily understand that while you are

within reach of each other, there must be a constant desire to be together. If distance renders this impossible, you will at last come to look upon the separation as inevitable, and learn to bear it calmly. I may be wrong, but this is my idea, and I hope at least that you will give it a trial. Meanwhile, you may rest assured that I will continue to watch over her with a mother's solicitude. Keep me informed of your movements from time to time, and keep up a brave heart."

Within a week from the date of Lady Barrington's letter, I was on board one of the steamers of the *Messagerie Impériale*, speeding over the blue waters of the Mediterranean towards the distant East.

BOOK III.

“ Oh ! wilt thou have my soul, dear, commingled with thy soul ?
Red grows the cheek, and warm the hand, the part is in the
whole ;
Nor hands nor cheeks keep separate, when soul is joined to
soul.”


CHAPTER I.

RETURN FROM THE EAST.

FOUR months afterwards, late on a September evening, I stepped from the train at Vevay, and proceeded to my favourite quarters at the Grand Hôtel du Lac.

I had journeyed far and seen much in the interval. I was browned and stained with travel, and physically was, as Dudley Grey predicted, "as strong as a horse;" but the old heart-sore was still as sensitive as when I left England, and I felt it was indeed in vain to hope that this would ever be healed.

On board the steamer in the Mediterranean, on my outward journey, I had fallen in with two Alpine men, bent on exploring



the almost unknown recesses of the distant Caucasus. They pressed me to join them, and the proposition seemed exactly to accord with my own views.

After loitering for a time to visit Constantinople and explore the beauties of the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn, we hastened on, and skirting the shores of the Black Sea, landed at length at Poti, the nearest *point d'appui* for our excursion into the interior.

At Tiflis I was enabled to procure the necessary outfit for the mountains, my friends having provided theirs before they left England. We were fortunate in securing tolerably efficient guides, and for the next two months we buried ourselves in the heart of the great Caucasian range, wandering among tribes who had scarcely ever looked upon the face of a European, except occasionally a stray Russian; subsisting on the coarsest fare, and pitching our tent wherever we happened to find ourselves when night fell

—sometimes in a fertile valley, sometimes in the deep recesses of a forest of pines, sometimes on the narrow ledge of a lofty peak ten thousand feet above the sea level.


We ascended the magnificent Elbruz, with its eighteen thousand feet of forest and snow, and then turned our steps southward to Ararat, where we were fortunate enough, after three attempts, to add our names to those of the few climbers who have been successful in gaining the icy summit. With this last achievement—by far the most difficult of any we had to encounter—we were more than content, and thence we turned our steps southward to fair Damascus and Jerusalem, and after a few more weeks of wandering among scenes so full of solemn associations, I found myself towards the end of August at Alexandria, filled with an intense craving for home and home news.

I had previously written to have my letters forwarded to Switzerland—for in that familiar land, which, after my distant wanderings,

would seem like a part of home to me—it was my intention to loiter for a time before returning to England. I was not by any means sure that I should feel sufficiently resolute to return to home life and home duties, and I wished to put myself to the test by stopping to analyse my feelings in some spot within a few hours' journey of England.

After lingering for a few days at the Italian lakes, whose softer beauties came upon me with a wonderfully soothing effect in contrast to the savage grandeur of the Caucasus and the burning sands of the East, I had pushed on over the Simplon to Brieg, and so down the Rhone valley to Vevay, whose lovely situation on the shore of the blue lake had always been a pleasant relief to me after a more distant and exciting excursion among the mountains.

On inquiring at the bureau, I found three letters awaiting me. The first was from Lady Barrington, merely stating that Mrs.



Lumley was still with her father and in good health, and that Lumley was in Scotland shooting grouse. I could not restrain a feeling of disappointment at the brevity of the letter, filled as my mind was with such an intense longing for news after so prolonged an absence; but I felt, at the same time, that there was really nothing more for my kind correspondent to say, as things were going on so quietly. I little anticipated then the events which followed so closely on my arrival in Switzerland.

The second letter was from Dudley Grey. He informed me that he was on the point of starting for the Continent, and begged me to meet him at Interlaken on a certain day in August, to join him in an attack on some new passes in the Bernese Oberland. The date named was long past, and I deeply regretted that I had not returned in time to meet my much-valued friend.

The outside of the third letter puzzled me not a little. The post-mark was two months

old, the writing was strange, and it was addressed to the Bellevue Hôtel, Brussels. Suddenly it flashed into my mind that it was an answer to my advertisement respecting the lost Madame Conneau. I hastily opened it and read the following :—

“Madame Conneau have seen the advertisement. She will with much plaisir communicate with the gentleman, if he will be so ver goot as to give more particular. If he will write to Poste Restante, Genève, and say what he want, Madame Conneau will consider.”

This letter puzzled me at first, it seemed so cautiously worded ; but I remembered that it was thought she had left Brussels in difficulties, and she doubtless wished to see her way clearly before committing herself to an interview with the advertiser. It seemed strange that this letter should have reached me when I was within such an easy distance of the spot to which I was to write. I concluded that, as the advertisement in the Belgian

papers had been in French, she could only have seen it in an old copy of *Galignani* some weeks after it was inserted, and therefore answered it in English, as it appeared in that journal.

I could not but rejoice exceedingly that I had thus unexpectedly recovered the clue which had seemed entirely lost, though a very keen regret filled my mind that my long absence had prevented my following it up before. I reflected, too, that it was quite possible a letter addressed to Geneva, after so long an interval, would not in all probability be attended with any result, as my correspondent would most likely have long ago given up all hope of an answer. Nevertheless, I determined to write by that night's post, and to proceed to Geneva myself with all possible dispatch.

Another of those strange coincidences, however, which seemed to follow me like a fate through all the circumstances I am recording, occurred that very evening.

While turning over the various newspapers on the table of the reading-room, I happened to take up a local print containing the list of visitors in the place, together with a number of advertisements of hotels and *pensions*. Almost the first of these which caught my eye was as follows:—

“Pension d’Angleterre (6—8 fr.), commanding beautiful views of the lake, the Rhone valley, and the Dent du Midi. Proprietress, Madame Conneau.”


I could scarcely believe my eyes ; an inner conviction at once flashed across me that this was the Madame Conneau I was so anxious to meet. The careful wording of the letter and the address at Geneva had evidently been but precautions on her part to feel her way before committing herself to an interview. I resolved, however, to call on her the first thing the following morning.

CHAPTER II.

MADAME CONNEAU.

How frequently it happens that, after one's life has been flowing on in an uninterrupted channel for months, or perhaps for years, without any startling changes, suddenly the whole course of events seems to alter, and a series of surprises breaks upon one in the most unexpected manner, changing the entire current of one's thoughts and marking a new era in one's existence.


Such a series of events seemed destined to befall me on the evening of my arrival. The letter from Madame Conneau took me by surprise; the discovery of her proximity was still more surprising; and now, another piece



of intelligence was in store for me, for which I was wholly unprepared.

Since my arrival I had felt an insatiable longing for some home news, and on applying at the bureau I succeeded in obtaining a whole file of English newspapers, extending over several weeks. I returned to the saloon, and settling myself in an easy-chair, commenced reading with an eagerness which can only be appreciated by those who have been long absent among scenes far removed from all communication with home.


I had looked through the papers of the most recent date, and was glancing at the contents of one dated about the middle of August, when suddenly I found myself staring fixedly at a paragraph which I was obliged to read two or three times before I could realise its meaning. The name, in connection with the event recorded, seemed to cause a sudden confusion of ideas, and it was only by a strong effort that I could bring myself to peruse it calmly. It was as follows:—



“MELANCHOLY GUN ACCIDENT.—We regret to announce that an accident of a very serious description occurred to Mr. Geoffrey Lumley, of Bradleigh Hall, Devon, on Wednesday last. Mr. Lumley was grouse-shooting in Scotland, and in crossing some rocks on the open moor, his gun accidentally exploded, lodging the contents in his left arm and almost shattering the hand. He lies in a very precarious state, from the shock to the system and loss of blood.”

I sat for some time with a strange, dazed feeling which it is difficult to describe. The news had come upon me so suddenly that I felt stunned, bewildered. Then came the reaction, and a rush of thought followed that sent the blood in a hot stream to my face.

I was but human after all, and I could not control the first wild thought which darted through my mind—was it possible that even now she whom I loved with such an absorbing love might be free, and that I might yet make her mine?



Immediately after I hated myself for the thought. Deeply as I loved her, I could not find my happiness on the suffering of another, and that one so old a friend. Better thoughts came to my aid; I felt all sympathy for him, and realised the horror of such an accident to so active a man as Lumley.

My first impulse was to telegraph to my partner, but on reflection I considered that Lady Barrington would probably know more of Lumley's present condition, and to her I accordingly sent an urgent message the same evening.

Was this the cause of the brevity of her letter? If so, I concluded that Lumley was still alive, and she thought it better for me to hear nothing of the accident until its results were known.

All that evening and the next morning I could do nothing but pace the saloons and gardens in the most restless state of mind. Madame Conneau was forgotten—I could not undertake a matter-of-fact interview with


her while my mind was in such a fever of anxiety.

The next afternoon brought me an answer.

"Mr. Lumley is recovering, though his system is greatly shaken; Ada went to him at once, and remains with him."

The intelligence was meagre enough, but it was sufficient. I should have been glad to know their whereabouts, but I concluded they were in Scotland. Nearly seven weeks had elapsed since the accident, so it was possible they had returned home—though in that case I thought Lady Barrington would have mentioned it. How I longed to write to Mrs. Lumley may be easily imagined, but I knew it was better to avoid it.

I now prepared myself for my interview with Madame Conneau. The *pension* named in the advertisement was not far from the hotel, and on inquiring for the mistress of the establishment I was shown into a room, and a few minutes after the mysterious lady whom I had been so anxious to encounter came in.



She was a little bright-eyed Frenchwoman, with a somewhat servile manner, and an expression that made me set her down at once for a humbug, though I was reluctant to apply the term to one who, as I afterwards found, had been left to battle with the world alone, her husband having died almost penniless some years before.

"Madame Conneau, I presume?" I said.

"*Oui, monsieur.* Ah, pardon! *Vous êtes Anglais.* Yes, sir. I speak English—I like the English much."

I told her she need not trouble herself to speak in English unless she preferred doing so; but she evidently considered it complimentary to me to make use of my language, and so the conversation was continued in my own tongue.

"I have called, Madame Conneau, respecting an advertisement I inserted in the newspapers, and which you answered."

I had thought it better to come to the point at once, and to express no doubt as to her


being the person who had written to me, although, up to that moment, it had occurred to me as very possible that I might be on the wrong track. All doubts were, however, dispelled the moment I mentioned my errand. She had evidently expected I was a customer, and had brightened up accordingly; but at the mention of the advertisement her countenance fell.

“*Ma foi!* but you take me very much by surprise, monsieur. I did beg you to write.”

“Precisely; but I happened by the merest chance to receive your letter here, and I also ascertained that you were living here, so I thought it much more sensible to come direct to you than to write to Geneva. Do not you agree with me?”

I spoke in a very decisive manner, so as to leave her no chance of evading the point, for she looked anxious and much disturbed in mind.

“*Certainement*, monsieur is truly right; but I am hardly prepared.”




"The information I require is very simple, and will not involve you in any trouble. May I ask if you remember a certain Mr. Cunnyngname, who was in your establishment at Brussels some five years ago?"

"Ah, it is so then! Will you pray sit down, sare?"

I took a seat as she indicated, and she seated herself opposite to me, with her back to the light. She continued, "Forgive me, but I must first demand your object in making this question?"

"I do not see how that bears upon the point; I merely wish to obtain some information about the gentleman to whom I refer. It is a very simple matter for you to answer, and I cannot see why you need hesitate."

It was evident to me that she wished to make her information a marketable commodity, and I felt she was an astute little woman. I was by no means unwilling to



purchase her information, but I wished to get as much as possible for my money.

"Madame Conneau," I said, "excuse the abruptness of the question, but I believe I am right in thinking that you left Antwerp under the pressure of pecuniary difficulties?"

The poor little woman collapsed visibly as I delivered myself of the last words, and I saw I had hit the mark.


"Ah, monsieur! you do not know—how can you know, you English? you are so rich. *Mon Dieu!* if you did but know my struggles."

"I can quite sympathise with you; you have had a hard struggle, doubtless, and for that reason I should not, of course, betray your whereabouts to any one in Antwerp."

"You are very good, monsieur."

"But," I continued, "it would be advisable for many reasons for you to answer my questions; indeed, it may be greatly to your advantage to do so."

I laid a strong emphasis on the last



words, and they produced a visible effect. She appeared much relieved, and said in a soliloquising tone—

“Ah, that is good! Then it was not true what he said?”


“What who said?” I inquired, in some surprise.

“Oh, I must not tell you—I must not betray; still, what have I to bind me?”

I could not understand what her drift was, so I said, somewhat impatiently, “Why do you not speak out plainly? I can assure you it is much better to be quite open with me. Who has been trying to influence you?”

“It is so difficult. It may be much harm to me. He has been my good friend.”

“Madame Conneau!” I exclaimed, a little impatiently, “I told you before the information I require is very simple, and can do no harm to any one about you. I cannot conceive to whom you allude, as this is a matter strictly between ourselves. You must not forget that



if you disappoint me, it is in my power to do you some harm ; as it is, I wish to do you good. To come to the point, I am quite able and willing to pay for any information you may give me."

I could see that this decided offer had the desired effect. She brightened up again, although she made an attempt to hide her satisfaction.

"What is it you wish to know?" she asked.

"A few minutes ago I merely wished for some information respecting Mr. Cunnyng-hame; now I wish to know who has been trying to influence you with regard to my advertisement?"

She evidently felt herself getting deeper and deeper into a difficulty. She sat silent a few minutes.

"Come, madame!" I continued, "my time is of value. I purpose returning to England by way of Brussels and Antwerp very shortly." I purposely emphasised the last


two names, and she gave a little start. She evidently did not approve of my route, considering the information I possessed. She began to waver.

"Now will you tell me his name?"

"You are hard upon me, but I do not see the harm. It was Mr. Cunnyngghame himself."

It was now my turn to start. "In heaven's name, what has he to do with my advertisement?" I exclaimed.

"You do not comprehend; listen. I do not see your advertisement until tree, four week after you write it. I think, what does this mean? It means, they want to find me because of my misfortunes. I am here, at a safe distance. I think of changing my name, but no—many of you English who come to me at Brussels, at Anvers, come to me here; I cannot change my name, I must trust to chance, but I will not answer that advertisement. Presently there come a letter from Monsieur Cunnyngghame. 'You will see



advertisement,' he write, 'do not answer it; it is only to find out where you are.' He was always my good friend. I take his advice. Presently I see advertisement in your *Times*. It is important, I thought, what shall I do? Monsieur Cunnyngame may be right, *c'est possible*, but he may be wrong. It may be good for me to answer. I will write, and give another address, and be very cautious. So I write, and wait, and wait, when, *voilà!* you come here to my very house, and you take off my breath."

A revelation broke upon me. The wily Cunnyngame had seen my advertisement, and had taken steps to prevent my meeting this woman. By what a providential chain of circumstances had his action been frustrated!

"Madame Conneau," I said, "I can, perhaps, understand Mr. Cunnyngame's object in endeavouring to prevent this meeting, but you see it was to be. I can only assure you that my motive was a good one, and I again

repeat that I will make it very much to your advantage to answer my questions."

"What is it you wish to know?"

"I wish to know something of Mr. Cun-nyngname's manner of life—whether he spent much time with you; what was his occupation; and whether he ever went by another name?"


"Oh, no, indeed; he was always a nice man—a leetle wild, spend money ver freely, but ver kind to poor Mrs. Lumley."

"Very kind to poor Mrs. Lumley!" I repeated, in utter amazement.

"Yes, indeed, monsieur! They spent much time together at my house in the Rue de Commerce."

I suppose I turned as white as a sheet, for the little woman looked alarmed, and exclaimed, "But you are not well, monsieur; you will let me get you some wine."

"Stay, stay!" I cried, clutching her arm, as she attempted to rise; "do not go, I am better now." Then, with an effort to be



calm, I continued, "You are confusing names, madame; you are thinking of the name of Mr. Cunnyngname's friend in England."

"Oh, yes, I know, her husband. It was a sad story—they could not agree. She was a pretty creature, that is true, but her temper—*Mon Dieu!* when she was in her temper——"

"Madame Conneau," I exclaimed, almost wild with the confusion of thought that was rushing through my mind, "pray tell me distinctly what you mean! Do you deliberately tell me that a Mrs. Lumley was staying in your house with Mr. Cunnyngname?"

"*Certainement*—Mrs. Geoffrey Lumley."

"You do not know what you are saying!" I exclaimed, grasping her wrist so that the poor little woman winced. "It cannot be true!"

"But I tell you, monsieur, it is; why do I wish to deceive you?"

"Mrs. Geoffrey Lumley?" I again gasped.

"*Oui!* What you call a ver handsome woman, but in weak health; and, oh, what a

temper! Ah, poor thing! I must not scold her now."

I rose, and took a turn across the room, pressing my hand to my forehead to endeavour to calm the tumult within, which seemed taking away my senses. Then I came back and sat down again.

"You say Mrs. Geoffrey Lumley was with Mr. Cunnyngname at your house—when was this?"

"Let me think. Ah, so; I remember. It was the year before I left Brussels—five years ago."

I drew a long sigh of relief. "Ah," I said, "I knew you were mistaken; Mr. Lumley was not married at that time."

A look of anger flashed into the little woman's face.


"But, monsieur, I tell you again it is true. I do not tell—what you call—lies. I know all her story—she tell me herself—a quarrel with her husband, a separation. Ah, poor thing! no doubt it hastened her end."

"Oh, she died then?" I responded, willing to humour the little woman in what I felt more and more was some imposition which had been practised on her.

"Yes, she died at Baden—her health was gone. Mr. Cunnyngname came back from there after attending her funeral. I know it, for he showed me the account for expense."

"Good heavens!" I thought, "what new complication have I stumbled on?" As Madame Conneau uttered the last words, the strip of paper flashed into my mind—"Funeral expenses per D. C., £50."

There was but one conclusion to draw from what I had heard. Lumley had been previously married—unknown to his father in all probability—and this was one of the secrets which bound Cunnyngname to him so closely. But why this secrecy? Even if the marriage had been an imprudent one—of which, from my early knowledge of the man, I had little doubt—death had at least softened all difficulties, and there must be some other cause



at work to influence Lumley to such an extent. Here, however, was a new and wonderful clue to the history of the past, and I felt that, step by step, I should at last unravel the tangled skein which surrounded the woman who was so inexpressibly dear to me.


I felt too much confused and perplexed by the strange intelligence which had thus come upon me to pursue my inquiries further that morning. I told Madame Conneau I was deeply indebted to her for the information she had imparted, and that I might see her again. She was on no account to mention to any one the fact of my coming to her, and I promised that she should receive a substantial proof of my gratitude that very afternoon.

CHAPTER III.

MOONLIGHT ON LAKE LEMAN.

THE intelligence received from Madame Conneau was so unexpected, that I required time for reflection. There appeared to be no doubt that Lumley had contracted an early and imprudent marriage, which had been kept a profound secret. It was by no means an unlikely event, considering his impulsive nature ; and the violent temper which seemed to impress Madame Conneau so much, coming into contact with his own, was not unlikely to lead to a separation.

Still this did not in any way explain Cunynghame's influence over him, nor did it explain the reference to so large a sum as




the five thousand pounds mentioned on the second slip of paper. There must evidently have been some other connection between them with reference to extensive monetary transactions, and it seemed that even now I had made but little way towards an elucidation of the mystery.

I saw Madame Conneau again the following day, and gained more particulars from her. I was desirous of knowing how she first became acquainted with them, and what brought Cunnyngname to her house. She informed me that Mrs. Lumley was the daughter of an Englishman, but her mother was a native of Belgium, and she had been brought up chiefly in the latter country. After her separation from her husband, she had come over to Brussels from her own choice, and thither Cunnyngname had been sent to negotiate concerning the future. She was of a much lower social position, the good lady informed me, than her husband, and her proceedings in England had

been evidently regarded with some suspicion, though the cautious little Frenchwoman would not commit herself by a direct insinuation against her character. Lumley, I knew, had several times quarrelled with his father, and had caused that gentleman great uneasiness by his wild, reckless behaviour. Whether this marriage had been known to the parent, I could not determine. It certainly seemed improbable, as, if it had been, my own father would most likely have been made acquainted with the fact.


I did not see that any more could be done, and my thoughts naturally reverted to my own affairs. What was I to do? I was still in a state of anxiety to learn further intelligence of Lumley's present condition. Lady Barrington's news had been of a very meagre character, and I fully expected to have received a letter from her containing further particulars; but to my surprise none came, although I waited in great anxiety for several days.



I could not yet make up my mind to return to England. It was impossible for me to visit the Hall, and it would be too tantalising to be in close proximity to one whom I was so desirous of helping at such a time as this, and yet to have to exercise the painful self-restraint of avoiding her. It would, therefore, be better for both of us if I still remained at a distance.

That my state of mind was anything but enviable may be easily imagined. Tourists were beginning to flock homeward; hotels were closing in the less frequented districts; the summer sunshine was passing away; and although to me the clear calm days of early October were infinitely preferable to the sultry days of June, I felt no desire to remain where I was, and yet I could not make up my mind to recommence my wanderings.


Suddenly Dudley Grey's letter recurred to me. As it was dated some weeks before, he had, of course, long since gone on from Inter-laken, where he had wished me to meet him,



but as there was still a week or two of fine weather to look for, I decided to go there in the hope of gaining some intelligence of his movements, and if possible to pick him up.


I wrote a long letter to Lady Barrington, begging her to send me a more detailed account of the accident, and asking her to convey my deepest sympathy to both Lumley and his wife, who I concluded must by this time have returned home. I gave her also a brief sketch of my wanderings, but avoided any reference to my present state of mind, thinking, if I did, it might induce her to withhold from me information I was most desirous of obtaining. On the evening before my departure, I retired early to my chamber overlooking the lake, and sat down at the window to gaze once more on that lovely scene which, from this spot especially, had always such a peculiar charm for me.

There was not a ripple on the surface of the water. The Savoy mountains opposite



lay in a dim, dreamy haze, and the stars were shining overhead in unimaginable splendour. The visitors who usually thronged the garden below during the quiet evening hours had all departed, and the little fountain which had all day long kept up its carol in unison with the birds, was the only sound that disturbed the intense stillness of the scene. Even this seemed to put on a sadder tone, more in accordance with the silent hour, and its low monotonous gurgle came to me like a human voice singing a sweet lullaby to the sleeping lake.

Presently above the dark pine-clad slopes that rose abruptly at the head of the lake, crowned by the bare crags which look down on Villeneuve and Chillon, a thin line of silver catching the outline of the mountain heralded the coming of the autumn moon. Slowly from behind those dark crags came the pure pale face, sending a rippling smile down to the still waters, and turning to living silver the fountain in the garden



below. Far away across the lake that mystic light gleamed upon the icy summit of the Dent du Midi, filling the Rhone valley with a lucid haze which blended crag and peak and forest in one broad scene of subdued splendour. How I longed for her who filled all my thoughts, I cannot tell! Saddened by the intensity of beauty, I absolutely craved for her companionship. Never at any time since I first knew her had I looked upon a beautiful scene without a burning desire for her to share its beauties with me, and this desire seemed to come back to me with renewed force that night. If I had not known her to be so far away I should have fancied her almost within call. That strange *influence* her presence always brought seemed to pervade the very atmosphere. I grew superstitious. I leaned from the window, and yielded to a weakness I had more than once felt creeping over me. Mentally I called to her, "Oh, my love! my darling! I feel your spirit with me now; wherever

you may be, I know that our souls at least are united." Instinctively I listened.


Two figures came from the shadow of the trees at the far end of the garden. The moonlight was full upon their faces—a youth and a young girl, whom I judged to be brother and sister. Close under my window they came and sat down upon a seat near the marble basin of the fountain. Their voices came up to me distinct in the night air.

"For all that," said the youth, "she was the sweetest woman I ever met. I wish we had changed our route and gone with them."

"A good thing for you we did not, Fred. You are half in love with her as it is, and would have tumbled over head and ears in another day or two; then what would her husband have said?"

"He!—stuff! He thinks of nothing but his own comfort. How she could ever have married him I can't conceive."

"So much the more danger for you, *cher frère*. It is a good thing we did not go to Interlaken."



CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH THE PINES.

“INTERLAKEN! how peacefully by the margin of the swift-rushing Aar thou liest, on the broad lap of those romantic meadows, all overshadowed by the wide arms of giant trees! Only the round towers of thine ancient cloisters rise above their summits; the round towers themselves but a child’s playthings under the great church-towers of the mountains. Close beside thee are lakes which the flowing band of the river ties together. Before thee opens the magnificent valley of Lauterbrunnen, where the cloud-hooded Monk and the pale Virgin stand like St. Francis and his Bride of Snow; and around thee are fields and orchards

and hamlets green, from which the church bells answer each other at evening! The evening sun was setting when I first beheld thee! The sun of life will set ere I forget thee!"

Such was Interlaken when Longfellow first visited it, and such in its outward aspect it still remains. Its social life may change, but the mountain-forms which hold it in a loving embrace are changeless, immutable. Effete dandies loiter under those spreading walnut-trees that shadow its grassy plains; fashion throngs its innumerable hotels; feeble valetudinarians listen languidly to the strains of music in the prim Kursaal; *soi-disant* Alpine climbers throng its walks with obtrusive *bâtons* scored with multitudinous names; but these cannot steal away the charm that Nature has stamped upon the emerald meads and pine-clad slopes, or dim the evening lustre that shines upon the pure forehead of the distant Jungfrau.

These were my thoughts as I sat, on the



evening of my arrival, looking from my bedroom window southward over the sublime range of the Oberland. The spot had always been a favourite loitering-place of mine, and though I came back to it now with a saddened heart, I was still as conscious as ever of the magical influence it must exercise over all who have a soul to feel the charm of Nature under her loveliest aspects.

On inquiring for Dudley Grey, I found he had left a note for me expressing his regret that he had failed to meet me, and stating that he was going on to Grindelwald to make some mountain excursions in the neighbourhood of his old friend the Schreckhorn. Thence he intended to cross over the Lauteraarjoch to the Grimsel, and so down the Rhone valley to Zermatt.

I knew from the date of his note and the lateness of the season that it would be in vain to follow him, as in all probability, before I could come up with him, he would have turned his steps homeward. A singular


feeling of isolation and loneliness came over me when I found that my intention of joining him was frustrated, and I decided at all risks to return to England within a few days, after revisiting one or two favourite and familiar spots in this neighbourhood.

From the reports in the English papers I found that there were rumours of an autumn sitting, to consider certain political complications which would not admit of delay. I heartily hoped that it might be so, as, now that my bodily health was restored, it seemed to me that the excitement of political life was the only thing to wean me from the ever-present burden of sad thoughts which filled my breast.

Having decided on my future course, I retired to rest the first night after my arrival in Interlaken in a more peaceable frame of mind than I had enjoyed for some time, and even looked forward with some amount of pleasure to the short excursions I had promised myself in the next day or two.

Even the most languid become early risers in Switzerland, and the restlessness which had grown upon me during the last eighteen months sent me forth at an early hour the following morning. I resolved to take a stroll before breakfast, and bent my steps in the direction of the well-known pine-forest, through which the path winds to the picturesque old castle of Unsprunnen. As I mounted the slight slope which leads from the road to the commencement of the pine-wood, the view of the lake of Thun came upon me under an aspect in which I had never before seen it, and with a beauty which held me breathless.

The lake lay as calm as a mirror, and the flat green pastures between me and its distant margin were wrapt in a soft haze that gave an additional charm to the more distant view. The first flush of sunlight, like the pink azalia, touched the summit of the far pyramid of the Niesen, and one rosy cloud rested on its northern slope, as a bird might rest with



folded wings throughout the night. To my left the pines rose dark and calm and silent, and a hush was over all the lovely landscape that carried my thoughts far away from the frivolity and fashion which would all too soon awake to destroy the perfect repose which nature now enjoyed.


I was reluctant to leave so fair a scene, but I was anxious to revisit my favourite old ruin, and pursued my way therefore into the deep recesses of the wood.

Although so near the haunts of man, I know of no spot where at this hour so deep a solitude may be found. The pines stand in such dense masses that the undergrowth is scant, and the straight solemn stems rising so thickly around, with their feathery crests almost shutting out the sky, seem to hide one from the outer world, and make it indeed a spot—

“Where musing solitude might love to lift
Her soul above this sphere of earthliness;
Where silence, undisturbed, might watch alone—
So cold, so bright, so still.”

I passed on thoughtfully among those majestic pines, and turning to the left at the end of the wood, mounted to the crest of the hill, where the entire splendour of the Lauterbrunnen valley breaks upon the view. The old castle was to my right, and crossing the intervening slope of grass—where Paul Fleming had lain erewhile at the feet of Mary Ashburton—I mounted the castle wall and sat down to enjoy one of the fairest scenes that earth can show.

The dark crags that border the valley were before me, and through their gateway I could see ridge after ridge of rock and pine melting away into the blue mists of morning. Far above all, rising into the clear, cloudless sky, were the stainless summits of the Jungfrau, the Monch, and the Eiger; and purer than all, on the ice-slope of the first, the Silberhorn with its ever-changeless snow. The coming sun just touched their eastern slopes, like the marble of Pygmalion flushing with the first rosy tint of life.



I gazed long and earnestly. It was impossible to look on such a scene and not be deeply moved. It seemed almost to compensate for hours of silent sorrow ; but presently that wild longing for the companionship of one whose memory always came back to me in the midst of scenes so fair, returned with unusual force, and mentally I cried, "Oh, that she were beside me now to enjoy with me the wonders of this enchanting spot!"

Is there truth in that aphorism of the poet, that all intense desires fulfil themselves? Even as I spoke the slight rustle of a dress in an angle of the ruin to my right caused me to turn quickly.


The one of all others in the world whom I longed to be with me at that moment was by my side, her eyes fixed on me with a look of wild wonderment and delight. I cannot describe the delirious rapture of that meeting ; I cannot even recall the first intense moments. I know that in an instant I was by her side, with her hands locked in mine, and with a

love in the eyes of both that seemed to penetrate even to the inmost soul.

"My darling! is it possible I find you here?" I at length gasped as I held her in my arms, and kept her from sinking down, as she seemed almost about to do.

She uttered some low murmuring words of intense happiness. The world seemed blotted out with all the painful past, and we lived only in the rapture of the present.


At length we grew more calm, and seated side by side on the old grey stones, we learnt from each other the circumstances which had brought about this strange meeting. She gave me all the particulars of the accident to her husband, which had very nearly cost him his life. She had gone to him in Scotland at once, and after a few weeks he had sufficiently recovered to be removed. Then the old difficulty about the Cunnynghames arose, and even Lumley saw that it would be placing his wife in a most painful position after all that had passed if they returned to Bradleigh.



"He was much softened towards me by my at once going to him of my own free will," she went on to say. "He has been more kind and considerate, and has even referred to you in a friendly manner. On consulting the doctors it was thought that we might travel by easy stages into Italy, where it was considered advisable he should pass at least a portion of the winter. We had intended going on over the Simplon from Berne, but Geoffrey took a fancy to this route, and we go on to Lucerne to-morrow, and thence over the St. Gothard to the Italian lakes. Ah, how little I thought what joy was in store for me when we diverged from our route! There must have been something more than mere chance in this."

The words I had heard in the garden at Vevay, the night before I left, flashed across me.

"Have you been travelling in company with an enthusiastic boy of seventeen or thereabout, with a pretty sister a year or two older?"




"Yes; we left them at Berne. They were on their way to join a married sister and her husband—but how could you know anything about them?"

"I heard of you, then, two nights ago," I replied. "The description was undoubtedly correct, but I little knew to whom our young friend referred, when I overheard him speak of you as the sweetest woman he ever met."

"What nonsense!" she exclaimed laughing. "He was certainly very kind, and was always ready to do any little thing for me, but I had no idea I had made so deep an impression. Geoffrey is of course very helpless still."

"Is the injury permanent?"

"I fear so, poor fellow. They thought at one time that amputation of the left hand would have been necessary, but providentially they were able to save it. His arm is almost useless still, and it is thought he will be always obliged to use a sling."



"It is very sad in one who was always so active."

"It is terrible ; and although he is patient with me, it affects his temper as well. He is more impulsive than ever, and less able to brook control."

"Shall I see him?"

She hesitated for some seconds, and then said, "It would be better not to do so. I should like you to meet as friends once more, nothing would give me greater satisfaction ; but in his present state it might be better to avoid it. He is by no means strong, and the doctors all say he must be kept from any excitement. The nervous system was very much shaken, and that is the reason they recommended a quiet month or two at some place out of England. They thought if he were at home he would be tempted to do more than he ought, as you know what an active life he has always led. There is no knowing how meeting you might affect him."

"I am anxious about your future," I said. "What will you do when you return home? You cannot remain at Bradleigh unless those people leave."


"That will never be, I fear. I do not like to think of the future. It is understood, however, that I return to my father's for a time. How I have longed to thank you for all you have done for him! The change was new life to him."

"Pray do not say a word about that; you must know how great a pleasure it was to me. You have not mentioned Ethel—is she with you?"

"Oh, no; she is with my father. It was a great grief to me to leave her behind, but with Geoffrey in this state it was better to do so; I cannot bear the thought of separation from her."

After a pause she went on—"The future is very dark to me; I do not seem to see my way at all."

"Come, come!" I replied, "you must



not despond; there are some bright moments in store for both of us I feel convinced. Think how entirely unforeseen was this meeting, and in this spot of all others, where I have so often longed to have you with me. I seem to invest it now with a mysterious association which makes me feel that it is in some way connected with happy days to come."

"You are more hopeful than I am; to me all seems dark. I have had so little brightness of late that it has made me desponding with regard to the future. I wonder when we shall meet again!"

"You may smile at my superstition," I replied; "but I have a firm inner conviction that it will be sooner than you anticipate."


"I hope it may be so. It is very wrong, I know, but I do feel most wonderfully strengthened by your presence; it has helped me more than I can express. But you have not told me anything of your own movements. Lady Barrington mentioned that she had

heard from you, and that you were well, but I thought you were still in the East."

I now saw the motive for Lady Barrington's brevity in her letter to me. She knew we should be in close proximity to each other, and thought it better that we should remain in ignorance of the fact. How little she foresaw in what a strange manner we should meet!"


I gave a brief outline of my wanderings, and the motive that brought me to Interlaken. "And now," I said, "tell me how it is that you are roaming among lonely ruins at such an early hour?—what prompted you to come to this spot of all others, and on this identical morning?"

"If I answered according to the promptings of my heart, I should say—my fate," she replied, with one of the old smiles which I remembered so well in the first happy days of our intercourse. "The truth is," she continued, "it is the only time I get to myself, and I have to make the most of it. I was



always an early riser, you know, and this morning it was so lovely, I felt tempted to rise still earlier than usual. After Geoffrey comes down, I have to devote the rest of the day to him. As for this spot, it was a favourite haunt of mine on the only other occasion on which I have been here. The pine-wood is my especial delight, but I little knew whose footsteps I was following as I threaded its pathways this morning."

The moments flew swiftly by, as they always do when we long so ardently to retard them. Almost an hour had passed before we had finished the questions which were uppermost in our minds, consequent on our strange meeting. I could hardly realise that she was absolutely again by my side; the whole scene appeared like a dream—a picture to be set in the framework of memory, and treasured for evermore. The old castle in which we sat, the slope of grass at our feet, the glorious valley before us, and the "silent pinnacles of aged snow"



which crowned the view—was it really a dream from which I should presently awake and sigh to think it had passed away? No. Strange as it all seemed I had but to turn to the loving face at my side to confess the reality of the moment; there was no uncertainty in the love which now answered my own in the depths of those earnest eyes. Each felt that disguise would be a mockery and a sham, and we read each other's hearts as truly as we read them on the night when I saw her last. Was it to be always thus—always this love, always these terrible partings? The thought seemed unendurable.

Presently she rose, with a sad, pale face. "This meeting has been a great comfort to me, heaven knows; but the parting is bitter—very bitter!"

"But we shall soon meet again," I answered. "Let my strong conviction be yours as well; I know we shall not be long separated."

"Ah! if I could only think so."

"I cannot tell you from what the feeling

arises. I am not generally superstitious, but I am so sure of what I say that I cannot be desponding. If I could only impart to you some of my hopefulness, how much happier we should both be !”

“Come, then, I will believe you !” she said, with a brightening face ; “the very thought lightens my heart. You must be a very magician to inspire me with hope after all my trials, but you have done so—and now, good-bye.”

“No ; I will go with you through the wood ; we will follow its shadows, and walk out into the sunshine beyond—together. It shall be a symbol of our lives.”

“No, no ! It is sinful even to think of that.”

“I will not admit even that much,” I said.

“You speak 'in paradoxes this morning ; yet, some way, I cannot cast aside the influence of your strong conviction. I will hope at least that we may soon meet again—beyond that I dare not go.”

We went on into the silent wood. The

straight, solemn pines rose around us like the fluted columns of some vast cathedral aisle; and seemed to hush the spirit and soothe the restless heart. We passed out on to the sunny knoll overlooking the lake and the distant mountains. Then I took her hand, and looked once more into her face—the same dear, loving face, the same soft, earnest eyes that I had known and loved so long.

We only said “good-bye,” and she went her way down the sloping path and across the sunny mead. I watched her until she was hidden by the walnut-trees that bordered the road; then I threw myself on the grass, and prayed as man never prays more than once or twice in a life.


When next we met, a revelation was made which changed our whole lives, and many things which had been all darkness were made light.

CHAPTER V.

HOME AGAIN.


THE short autumn session and the Christmas-time were both over. The former had not been productive of any great event, but it had given me the opportunity of again taking my place in the House amid the congratulations of many friends; and I had so far recovered from my despondency as to enter with zeal into those political contests without which, the wisest have affirmed, no country can be properly or securely governed.

Time had done for me what it must do for all who have patience to wait. It had not subdued my sorrow, but it had taught me to bear calmly what I now felt was inevitable.




She who had been such an influence on my life, was as dear to me as ever. Indeed she grew even dearer as time went on. She was seldom absent from my thoughts, and her memory became to me almost an embodiment, which pervaded every thought and action. That I was a better man through her love, I knew; that my life was a more useful one, with nobler aims and actions, I was equally certain—and this thought alone brought a calm such as I could draw from no other source.

The Christmas had been a pleasant contrast to the last; I had accepted an invitation from Dudley Grey to spend it with him at his father's house in Hampshire. Old Lord Allcourt was what I should call a true Conservative, deeply attached to our most cherished institutions, but not obstinately opposed to such necessary modifications as fitted them to the exigencies of the time. Dudley was a son after his own heart—the elder one, and consequent successor to the



title, not caring much for political life ; and, as his favourite son's most intimate friend, I soon found myself firmly installed in the old earl's favour, and profited much by the sound advice he was always ready to impart to both of us for our future help and guidance.


We had a fair sprinkling of the feminine element in the household, Grey having two sisters as frank and open-hearted as himself ; and a constant succession of guests of both sexes kept up a round of gaiety, which was in strange contrast to the life I had led for so long a time. From this I confess I shrank with a sensitiveness not difficult to define. I could not yet listen to a song which brought back memories of that happy time, without a return of that feeling of desolation which had rendered my life so unendurable. The books that were discussed, the rides projected every morning, all revived the same heart-pangs ; and, as far as I could without laying myself open to the charge of unsociability, I avoided it all. It was thought that my whole



mind was set upon my future career, and people, to a certain extent, let me alone. I often smiled to think how little the real secret of my life was guessed, and how the presence of one woman would have made me foremost in every project for enjoyment—for I felt that my capacity for enjoyment was as keen as ever.


Although great kindness had been shown me by all the family, I was not sorry when the time for my departure arrived and I got fairly into harness again. Lady Barrington's words, "Work, work; it is the panacea for all earthly ills!" still rang in my ears, and the first duty before me, when the Christmas-time was over, was to redeem my long-delayed promise of visiting my constituents.

It was no slight trial to return to those scenes under such changed circumstances—the Hall occupied only by the two people in the world who were the most obnoxious to me, and Lumley and his wife still absent in a foreign land.



Some little consolation was, however, afforded me in again meeting the Barringtons, for whom I had always felt the warmest regard. I was their guest during my stay in the neighbourhood, and an especial pleasure was in store for me in the shape of a letter from Mrs. Lumley, enclosed in one to Lady Barrington, who had informed her that I was coming to them.

"After all the kindness you have shown me," she wrote, "I know I cannot be wrong in sending you a few lines, and I hope much to hear of you in return. We are still lingering here, for Geoffrey is not yet well enough to run any risks of a colder climate, or a return to excitement and activity. I must, however, confess that it is difficult to control him. He has unfortunately no resources in himself, no participation in those enjoyments which others derive from the many interesting objects and associations of this land of poetry and art. I feel that at any moment he may rebel, and make a sudden start for



home. I hear from dear Lady Barrington that you are to be with them shortly. It seems hard to realise the changes time has brought about—to look back to the days of your first visit, and to think we are no longer there to welcome you; and even if we were, that circumstances have set up an impassable barrier between us. What a strange, sad fate it is! I often think of your strong conviction; I wonder if you feel it still. There is one point I much wish to touch on. Do you remember one night, when we were leaving the dining-room, I said to you, ‘Literature, the Bar, Politics—is it not possible to combine the first and last?’ and you promised you would do your best? I am afraid you have forgotten the first. Would it not be a new resource and a new pleasure to you? Will you think of it; and, may I add, for my sake?”

“Always my gentle monitor,” I thought, as I refolded her letter, “and more mindful of me now than herself.” I felt there was truth in her words, and I set myself to think in


what way I could carry them out. The problem was soon solved.

I had kept a tolerably regular journal of my eastern trip, and most of the ground we had traversed was comparatively new. I resolved on my return to town to try and turn my observations and experiences to some account, and endeavour to produce a work that might at least prove some pleasure to her who had instigated it, if not to others. For the present, however, it was not to be. Events of far deeper significance turned my thoughts into another channel, and banished all thought of self for many a weary month.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNEXPECTED SUMMONS.

ABOUT a week after the receipt of these letters, the "Grand Political Dinner," so often projected and so long delayed, came off. The affair was a triumphant success. The dinner was excellent—the whole resources of the town having been brought into requisition—the room overflowing, and the speeches were decidedly above the average of those one hears on such occasions. I responded to toasts, and proposed toasts, and gave a somewhat lengthened sketch of the present political situation, with a forecast of the probable future. My reception—in spite of my shortcomings—had been most enthusiastic, and I



could not but feel greatly gratified by the kindness I met with at the hands of those who were still comparative strangers to me.

It was late in the evening before I had a chance of getting away, but I was not sorry when the time at length arrived. Sir John was with me ; I was to return home with him for another day or two, and when the carriage was announced we made our way down to the entrance-hall of the hotel, where we had to get through the serious business of shaking hands with about fifty couple of voters, ranged on either side of us. We were in the midst of this operation when my eyes suddenly fell on a man pressing eagerly through the crowd, and a moment after I recognised the coachman from Bradleigh ; he had a note in his hand which he presented to me, as if it were a matter of some importance.

"Master said I was to be sure and let you have this to-night, sir," he said.

"Your master ! Is he then at home ?"




"Yes, sir. They came back late last night. I was to say you need not take the trouble to write any answer, sir. Master hopes to see you."

"Very well," I responded, scarcely knowing what I said. The whole thing was so sudden it fairly took my breath away, and I felt it was a hard matter to appear unconcerned.

"Rather a sudden spurt this of Lumley's," said Sir John, who had overheard the conversation; "what's it all about, I wonder?"

I was positively afraid to open the note, with so many curious eyes about. The remark of the coachman that no answer was required made me resolve to keep it until I reached home. In spite of myself I dreaded the contents, as I knew that Lumley must have some very strong motive indeed in writing to me after what had passed, and in expressing a hope that he would see me.

To my great relief I found on arriving at Highmoor that the ladies had retired. I lost



not a moment, therefore, in following their example, and on reaching my room hastily tore open the note. It was as follows:—

“MY DEAR HOLFORD,

“We did not part altogether on bad terms, so I have less hesitation in writing to you now. I have long thought I judged you and Ada harshly. She has been my good angel through this tedious illness.

“I have come back to find myself in the midst of some cursed annoyances. Come over to me the first thing to-morrow, and I promise you, you won't regret it. I was glad, indeed, to hear that you were so near at hand. Ada would, I know, send all sorts of good wishes, only she doesn't know I am writing. Don't fail me.

“Yours very truly,


“GEOFFREY LUMLEY.”

I sat staring at this letter in utter bewilderment for several minutes; it was quite

beyond my comprehension. Although Lumley's money affairs were, I knew, in by no means a flourishing condition, still he was not pressed, and it was difficult to conceive any other motive for his so suddenly desiring my presence. It was useless speculating. I, of course, resolved to go early the next day; and I could not repress a thrill of delight at the thought that I might possibly pass a few days there on the old footing. Alas, how little I anticipated what the morrow was to bring forth!

My parting words in the old castle of Unsprunnen came back with strange force that night. I had felt then that we should meet again soon, but I little thought under what circumstances that meeting would take place.

It was arranged that I was to ride over to the Hall immediately after breakfast. Lady Barrington had been informed of the arrival of the Lumleys, and I saw that she looked uneasy when my intention of going there was



announced, evidently dreading the consequences of a renewal of my intercourse with Mrs. Lumley. She expressed great anxiety to see her favourite friend as soon as possible, and proposed driving over herself in the afternoon.

My feverish state of anxiety to learn the meaning of Lumley's summons may be easily imagined, and I mounted my horse and started as soon as possible.

It was a clear, sunny morning. The hoarfrost lay white in the shadows of the trees and hedges, but the sunbeams had swept the fields to an emerald brightness, and the sky was without a cloud. I passed the turn of the road where, as it appeared to me, ages ago Mrs. Lumley had first pointed out to me the Barringtons' house, on that memorable morning of our first ride. What a life I had lived since that time! What a revolution of all my thoughts and feelings had taken place! Still, it seemed to me, that events were tending to some unknown, mysterious future, and I lost


myself in vain speculations as to what that future would be.

I reached Bradleigh with a beating heart. At any moment I might see her. It was impossible to control my emotion ; but no one but the servant was visible as I gave my horse to the groom and entered the hall. I was evidently expected early.

"Master is in the library, sir," the footman said ; "he wishes you to come to him there."

I went on to the familiar room which I had last visited under such strange and painful circumstances. Would she be there, too ? I wondered, almost hoping she would not. I could not bear to meet her in that room, and in the presence of another.

To my great relief, I found Lumley alone. He was seated on the couch, in the corner by the fire. He looked wretchedly ill ; his left arm was still in a sling, his face had entirely lost its healthy colour, and his strong frame appeared to have shrunk to nothing. I had



never seen him since his accident, and I was startled and shocked at the change.

"Forgive my getting up, Holford," he said; "I am weak as a rat still, and most infernally annoyed at present. It's awfully good of you to come, but I'm afraid you won't find the business agreeable."


"Nothing very serious, I hope—no more money complications."

"Well, in one sense I'm afraid it's rather worse. In fact, I want you as a witness, for I've rather a serious charge to bring against a certain friend of mine."

"Dick Cunnyngname!" I exclaimed, in surprise.

"Dick Cunnyngname," he answered, with a nod.

I began to be alarmed. Matters must have been serious indeed to have caused this change in Lumley; and after what he had told me, I feared his impulsiveness had induced a determination which might result in injury to himself.



"Have you fully considered your course?"
I asked.

"Fully; and have made up my mind to act at all risks. Ring the bell, Holford."


"First tell me about your health."

"Bad enough, heaven knows! Ada, as I told you, has been like an angel to me; I feel more and more how unworthy I am of her. She will be put through an ordeal to-day, poor girl, which I would give something to avert, but it is better for her—better for all; and if I am not mistaken, she will like me all the more for it."

"For goodness' sake, Lumley, don't act rashly. Had you not better make me acquainted with the circumstances while we are alone? there may be some way of avoiding an open collision with this man."

"No; my mind is made up. The sacrifice is all on my part, and if I hesitate now, I may not have courage another time. No; let us get it over at once."

He pointed once more to the bell. I still
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lingered, though my hand was on it. I felt that the downward pressure of that handle would, like the spark which ignites the torpedo, explode a whole train of events, the effects of which I could neither calculate nor control.

"For the sake of your wife," I said.

"Better for her, and for all, I tell you—ring!"

I pressed the bell. Neither spoke until the servant appeared in answer.

"Tell Mr. Cunnyngname I want him."

"Yes, sir."


Again we were silent, until the man reappeared.

"Mr. Cunnyngname says he will come when he has finished his pipe, sir."

"Tell him I want him now, and that I can't wait."

There was a decision about Lumley which I had never seen before in connection with his friend. I felt that a collision would be serious.

In three minutes Cunnyngname lounged easily into the room. He was in a loose morning costume, and his pipe was still in his mouth. He started a little when he saw me, and looked anxiously at Lumley, as if to inquire why I was there, and whether the visit were hostile to him. He sat down in the easy-chair, on the opposite side of the fireplace to Lumley. I stood leaning against the mantelpiece between them. The large library table was in the centre of the room, the window opposite me, and the door to the right. Against the wall to my left, beyond the couch where Lumley sat, was a large, old-fashioned book-case, stored with the well-bound volumes usually found in old country-houses. On the right, opposite the book-case, was a pedestal, with a remarkably well-executed bust of Lumley's father. Every object was familiar, and the recollection of this particular morning comes back to me with unusual vividness in connection with the events which followed.



Lumley had noticed Cunnyngname's inquiring look at me.

"Holford is here by my request this morning," he said.

Cunnyngname looked surprised, but at the same time relieved; he crossed his legs and puffed lazily at his pipe. Lumley continued—

"I've something to say to you, Dick, which it won't be over agreeable for you to hear, and I wish to say it in the presence of a witness."

Cunnyngname took his pipe from his mouth with an unconcerned air, looked calmly at Lumley, and said, "You're not going to make a fool of yourself, Geoffrey, are you?"

Lumley took no notice of the observation, but went on quietly—"The last time you came down upon me to pull you through your infernal scrapes, I told you that I wouldn't do it again, whatever the consequences might be."

"And I told you," struck in the other, "that I should advise you to modify the latter part of your sentence."

"You did. I'm afraid, however, your advice was useless ; if you had dropped upon me again, I should have kept my word and refused."

"Well, but I have not dropped upon you again."

"No, but you have done something worse."


"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that on my way home, I stopped in Exeter a night, and paid a visit to my banker. It is rather an unusual thing for me to do, but what is still more unusual for me, I went carefully over my pass-book. Now, perhaps, you understand what I mean?"

Cunynghame turned as white as a sheet.

"Look here, Geoffrey," he said ; "what has passed between us two had better be kept to ourselves. If you wish to go into these matters, either ask him to retire, or defer it till another time."

Just as if he had not spoken, Lumley went on—"I have purposely sent for Holford to tell you, in his presence, what I discovered.




I found several cheques for large amounts debited to me which I knew nothing about—which, in fact, I never drew. You are the only person who has had access to my cheque-book, through my cursed folly in leaving you the keys; and I know from bitter experience that you possess a remarkable facility in imitating another person's handwriting."

Cunynghame's face grew livid with rage—he started to his feet.

"Hold your tongue!" he exclaimed; "I think you have gone mad! You don't suppose I'm such an infernal fool as to let you bring such a charge against me without retaliation? Do you know," he added, turning suddenly to me, "that this man is guilty of the very——"

"Stop!" cried Lumley, in a loud, determined tone. "You don't half know me yet, Dick; I'm coming to that by-and-by: but we'll have another witness when I accuse myself. Holford, will you ring the bell again?"



Cunynghame recoiled, amazed at the unlooked-for determination which Lumley evinced. He had never been brought to bay like this in all their intercourse, and his face worked with a suppressed rage which was an ugly thing to behold.

"Geoffrey," he said, "you don't know what you are doing. Let me once more advise you to stop."

"Holford, do as I tell you."


Once more I pressed the bell. The servant appeared.

"Tell your mistress I want her here immediately," said Lumley.

It was now my turn to interfere. "Let me entreat you not to drag your wife into this miserable business," I said.

"Ah! you're right there," struck in Cunynghame; "take his advice, Geoffrey. I tell you, you don't know what you're doing."

"I know perfectly well what I am doing; and, moreover, I mean to do it, in spite of the worst you may do."



"Geoffrey, you'll find me a desperate man if you rouse me. *You don't know what that worst is !*"

The last words dropped slowly from his lips, with a malignity in his tone which made me shudder.

At this moment the door opened, and Mrs. Lumley entered the room.

"It is too late," said Lumley—"she's here."

"You idiot! you have brought it on yourself!" responded Cunnyngahme.

CHAPTER VII.

REVELATIONS.

MRS. LUMLEY paused in amazement at the door. I stepped forward and took her hand.

"What is it?" she asked, with a terrified look, as she saw the expression on the features of us all.


"Come here, Ada," said Lumley, with quite a tenderness in his tone; "come and stand near me, but don't touch me until you have heard what I have to say."

Slowly she advanced to his side of the table, and looked at us all inquiringly. I saw by her face she dreaded that it was some evil connected with me which had caused her to be summoned.

There was silence for some seconds. I saw Lumley's face working with an expression I had never seen there before. She saw it too.

"What is it, Geoffrey?" she said.


She advanced to his side and was about to take his hand. He put up both his own and motioned her back again. Then he went on in broken tones—"Ada, I have sent for you that you may hear a confession which I would have given my life to have spared you, but I cannot go on in the state I have lived in for so many years. It is better for you that you should know all, and you must think as well of me as you can when I have told you. I have loved you more than I thought it possible for me to love any one. I wished to stand well in your sight—I wished to hide from you the misery and degradation of my former life. I feel now it is better to confess it, and rid myself of the thralldom which that scoundrel has imposed upon me. You will understand, when I have told you all, why it is I have inflicted his presence on you



so long. It would have been better if I had told you long ago—if I had trusted to your goodness—but God knows I could not bear to think you should have a mean opinion of me, which I fear you must have after to-day.”

Once more she advanced quickly to his side. “Oh, Geoffrey! I am content not to know. Send him away, and let us go on happily as we have done in these last few months. Geoffrey, dear, do not distress yourself to say more.”

“It is too late now,” he resumed; “I have brought a charge against that man which he will resent. It is not in his nature to let me escape. Listen to me!” He stopped a moment, unable to proceed. We all stood as if spell-bound—Cunynghame wearing the same fiendish look of defiance. “Ada, darling,” Lumley continued, “before I knew you I led a reckless life. I believe I hurried that poor old man, whose likeness you see yonder, into his grave, although even he didn’t know my greatest fault. In the midst of my



excesses I met with a woman of the worst class, and in a fit of anger with my father, because he would not grant me some slight concession, I married her. I found I had married a very devil, but she had a hold upon me in the threat of informing my father, which I could not shake off. This man, who always professed to be my friend, got her away abroad, and told me that, by the payment of a large sum, he could induce her to give up all claim on me and keep the secret of my marriage, which I knew would be a death-blow to my father. I had no means of raising the money. My father's patience was exhausted, and I was driven to desperation by the threat of instant exposure. In a mad moment I was induced to forge my father's name to a bill for five thousand pounds. That fellow, an adept at such practices, was the fiend who tempted me to this course; and to this day he holds letters of mine, implicating me to such an extent, that he could ruin my character at any

moment if I drove him to desperation. My father's death enabled me to meet the amount when the bill fell due, and the woman died shortly after, so exposure was prevented; but ever since then I have been that man's slave. It is true that I could have dragged him down with me if he had attempted to expose me; but it was to spare you the knowledge, to stand well in your sight, that I have sacrificed so much and borne with him so long—for I knew that his first act would have been, if I had defied him, to make you acquainted with the facts. Circumstances have happened now which render my position unbearable. He had almost ruined me before—now he has robbed me. Rather than endure it, I throw myself on your mercy, and ask you to forgive me. God knows the agony of mind I have undergone, and the struggle I have had to conceal it all under a rough exterior. Can you forgive me, and be to me the loving wife you have always been?"

She was at his side in a moment, and was about to throw her arms round his neck, when she was arrested as if by a spell.

With a horrible distinctness which rings in my ears to this day Cunnyngahme spoke.

"Perhaps Mrs. Lumley will be surprised to hear that there is another person who has a better claim to the title of wife—I mean the first Mrs. Lumley, *who is still alive.*"


A look of wild incredulity passed over Lumley's features.

"You lying scoundrel!" he cried. "What do you mean by that?"

"Simply what I say. The first Mrs. Lumley is still alive and in London. If you don't believe me, look at that; it is dated three days ago."

He drew a letter from his pocket, and presented it to Lumley. In the horror of the moment I saw that the writing was recognised.

An expression of absolute terror flashed into Lumley's face as he stared at the paper



in Cunnyngame's hand. Then his face relaxed, and a look of scornful incredulity followed.

"Another of your clever devices," he exclaimed; "but you cannot impose upon me by such a miserable artifice as that. I know your talents too well to suppose that you would hesitate to alter a date. No, no; bad as you are, I don't believe you bad enough for a deed that would blacken hell itself."

Although he tried to speak calmly, I saw that he only half believed what he said. The horrible dread that Cunnyngame might be speaking the truth still lurked beneath, and I noticed that he did not venture to look towards his wife.

"If you don't believe me, ask him," said Cunnyngame, speaking with the same deliberation, and jerking his thumb over his shoulder at me. "He saw her with me at the theatre, not many months since."

"Is this true?" gasped Lumley, with an



expression which seemed to imply that all the world was leagued against him.

I felt that the question was too serious to waver or equivocate, although I would have given worlds to have been able to deny it. I felt, too, that Mrs. Lumley's future fate hung upon my answer. It was an awful moment.

"Is this true?" repeated Lumley, with eyes that seemed to look into my very soul.

"It is true that I saw him with two companions at the theatre; but it is impossible for me to say who they were," I answered.

"Ask him to describe them," said Cunnyng-hame with a diabolical leer on his face. "You will find there is not much mistake about it."

"What were they like?" asked Lumley, in a voice whose hoarse utterance made me feel that his faith was fast leaving him.

"Lumley, it is horrible to me to be the means of adding to the misery you and your

wife are already enduring. If I describe them, it will only complicate matters; such a fearful statement as this requires stronger proof than mere description. One of the women was light, the other dark; I can tell you no more."

"Yes, you can—the dark one;—did you notice any peculiarity here?"

He pointed to the side of his mouth. His hand shook like that of a palsied man. My heart sank within me at the question, but I knew it was useless to hesitate, so I answered—

"Yes; she had a deep scar on that side of the mouth."


Never can I forget the fearful expression that passed over Lumley's face. He rose from the couch, grasped the corner of the mantelpiece for an instant, as if to steady himself, then sprang forward, and with his one hand clutched Cunnyngahme by the throat with a fierce, deadly clutch that was meant to strangle him.

"Devil!" he gasped between his clenched teeth; "treacherous, lying devil—your life shall pay for this!"

The next moment he reeled and staggered, and fell back upon the sofa. In these few awful moments I had scarcely looked at her who was the chief sufferer in the scene. I now turned. She was standing as rigid as a statue—her lips moving in the attempt to articulate, her eyes wide open in speechless horror, and her face white and drawn.

"Oh, my God!" she gasped; "take me away, take me away from this wicked house! She stretched her hands towards me; in another moment my arms were about her or she would have fallen. I carried her, half-fainting, from the room. In the hall I encountered Dawes, the butler, who had been scared by the commotion. The man looked horror-stricken when he saw me with Mrs. Lumley helpless in my arms.

"Mercy on us, what's the matter, sir?" he exclaimed.



I motioned him to be quiet. "Fetch her maid at once," I said; "bring her to the drawing-room."

It was the nearest room, and I carried her there and placed her on a couch. She was quite unconscious now, and I was thankful for it. I threw some flowers aside from a vase and sprinkled the water on her face. Her maid came in a few seconds. "Stay with her here until she recovers," I said; "do not leave her—I will return as soon as possible."

I was afraid to leave Lumley and Cunnyng-hame alone, so turned to hasten back. To add to my consternation, little Ethel at this moment came bounding into the room. A horrible feeling shot through me as I looked at her bright young face, and thought of her future. I dreaded the effect on the poor mother also if she should revive and see her.

"Ethel, darling," I said, as I took her hand, "come away now; poor mamma is very un-

well. Go to the nursery, and stay until I send for you."


The obedient little child came with me out of the room, and went slowly up-stairs, looking back at every step with her great wondering eyes.

I felt half-distracted to know what was best to be done, but at this moment Providence came to my aid. As I recrossed the hall, I saw Lady Barrington stepping from the pony-carriage. She handed the reins to the groom and advanced to the door. I sprang to meet her.

"The morning was so fine, I thought I would drive over early," she began; then, observing my face, she added, "but is anything the matter?"

"Hush!" I replied; "a fearful thing has happened! I will tell you by-and-by. Thank heaven you are come! you are the only one who can help me now."

"Is it about you?" she asked, in a quick whisper.



"No, worse—far worse; go to her there," I said, pointing to the drawing-room; "ask her no questions; I will return again as soon as possible."

I turned into the library. Lumley was on the sofa with his eyes closed, his lips moving inarticulately, and his whole frame quivering, so that I thought he was in a fit. Dawes, who had just entered the room, was looking on, not knowing what to do, and Cunnyngname was standing irresolutely by the fire, as if scared by his own work.

"Get some brandy at once," I said to Dawes. He left the room quickly, glad to be doing something. I turned to Cunnyngname. "You villain!" I cried; "I hope you are satisfied with your vile work. Get out of my sight and quit the house,"

"Not so fast," he answered defiantly; "you had better keep a civil tongue in your head. You may ruin me, but an action for bigamy would not be a pleasant thing for your

friends. These things had better be kept quiet."

The scoundrel had still a trump card, and I saw that he felt his advantage. It stung me beyond all endurance. I turned on him savagely.

"If you don't leave this house within ten minutes, I will take the law into my own hands; and this time, I promise you, I will not spare you."

"Curse your impertinence!" he replied; "what do you mean by ordering me about like this?"

It was a miserable satisfaction, but I acted on an impulse of the moment. I took the scoundrel by the collar and shook him until he reeled and staggered, as I should have shaken a snappish cur: then I forced him across the room, and hurled him through the doorway, slamming the door behind him.

Dawes returned with the brandy. I hastily poured some into a glass, and managed to

get a little into Lumley's mouth. "Send for a doctor at once," I said to the man. He left the room again, and I sat down beside Lumley. He seemed to grow calmer now. Dawes returned. "Stay with him," I said, "and let me know when he revives."

I hastened back to the drawing-room. They had managed to remove Mrs. Lumley to her own room. One of the maid-servants was there, and the whole household was now in a state of commotion, although they did not know what had happened. I sent her up with a message to say that I wished to speak to Lady Barrington as soon as she could leave her charge. She came down in a few minutes.

"For pity's sake, tell me what it all means, Mr. Holford," she said.

"Oh, it is too dreadful; I can hardly summon courage to tell you—he has another wife living!"

She looked at me in speechless amazement.

"Is it possible? This is really too awful," she gasped, sinking back in her chair.

"Let me implore you, Lady Barrington, not to give way. I feel utterly unable to cope with this fearful disaster; you must help me to decide what to do."

"This has come upon me with such fearful suddenness," she said. "Poor child, poor child! I thought she was raving—I could not understand what she meant. I almost fear for her reason. Tell me one thing. Was he aware of this?"

"No, no. It was all that scoundrel Cunnynghame's doing. The blow has prostrated Lumley as well. I fear the consequences will be as disastrous to him as to his wife. What a fearful future is before her! But it is no use dwelling on that now. Can you get her to your house at once?"

"Oh, yes; she has been entreating me to take her. The carriage will be here directly. And you—what will you do?"

"My duty is there," I replied, pointing to

the library ; "I cannot leave Lumley in this state."

"Hush !" said Lady Barrington, making a sudden movement with her finger towards the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER THE SHOCK.

I TURNED quickly, startled by her sudden exclamation and movement.

Mrs. Lumley, with her bonnet and shawl on, stood within the doorway. A feverish flush had succeeded the deadly pallor of her face, but there was a restless excitement in her eyes which alarmed me. She came rapidly towards me. "Where is he?" she asked; "dreadful as this is, he was not guilty, and I cannot leave without seeing him."

"I will go with you," I answered; "this is good of you, indeed."

We passed into the library without another

word. Lumley was sitting up with his eyes open, and Dawes supporting him from behind. He gave a cry of delight when he saw who was come. I motioned to Dawes to leave the room, and then I turned myself and went out, closing the door after me; I felt there must be no witness of such a parting as this.

More than half an hour passed away. There was no sound from within the room. The carriage had come to the door, and we were wondering what was best to be done. Lady Barrington suggested that I should go in to them, as she feared the effect of the shock they had both undergone. I tapped lightly at the door and entered.

Mrs. Lumley was sitting by Geoffrey's side upon the sofa, holding his hand in hers. To my great surprise, her bonnet and shawl were off, and she showed no signs of departure. She looked up as I entered.

"I shall not leave him in this state," she said; "I cannot do it."

Lumley put up his hand in a deprecating manner, but did not speak. I returned to Lady Barrington, and told her what had happened.

"Poor child!" she said, as her eyes filled with tears; "I thought that first wild desire to get away was but the result of the shock. I knew her tender heart would recoil at the thought of leaving him in this state after all these years; but it is imperative that she should go, however painful it may be."

"Let us at least leave them for a time," I said.

We sent the carriage away, and another half-hour passed. At length I heard the library bell, and soon after a servant entered.

"My master wishes to speak with you in the library, sir."

I hastened to obey the summons, and found Lumley alone. He took my hand silently.

"Holford," he said at length, "she is all goodness; but she must not stay here. Get

Lady Barrington to take her at once. I—I could not bear it later; I have told her it is better for both that she should go. I know it is better for her—God help her! Let it be done at once, or I shall break down altogether. Pray do not delay.”

I felt that I could say nothing to comfort him. I returned to the drawing-room, where Lady Barrington was waiting, and told her what had happened.

“Better so,” she said; “better to end it at once, though it will be a bitter trial. I will go to her at once. Meanwhile, will you order the carriage to come round again?”

She left the room, but returned in a few minutes.

“She consents to go with me, as it is his wish, but only on condition that you remain with him.”

“That she may rely on. I would not leave him on any consideration. Is she to see him again?”

“She is with him now. We shall all be

able to think more calmly when this dreadful parting is over, and arrange some plan for the future."

We had gone into the hall, the carriage had come round again, and we stood waiting.

The library door opened, and Mrs. Lumley came out. She put out her hand in a helpless kind of way, as if unconscious of what she was doing. I drew it through my arm immediately, and took her to the carriage. Lady Barrington followed. After she was seated, Mrs. Lumley turned and spoke to me.

"Ethel will not come for a day or two—I could not leave him quite alone; you will be kind to him, will you not?"

"Trust me," I replied; and in those two words she understood all that was needed.

She fell back in the carriage with such a weary look of woe, that my heart bled for her. Lady Barrington leaned forward, and said in an undertone—

"You shall hear from me in a few hours, or to-morrow at the latest."

I pressed her hand silently, and the carriage drove away. I turned back into the house, as she had turned that morning of my departure, two years ago.

Was it possible, I asked myself, that time could have brought such a change? On that occasion I had left the house feeling that I might never enter it more. Now she had gone forth never to return, and in the duty I had before me I felt that my right to remain was greater than she could ever feel again. This reflection came upon me with a feeling of desolation which seemed to pervade everything. The pure, bright spirit was gone—gone with a broken heart and a blighted life, with a future which I shrank from contemplating—it was all too dreadful. I turned with a weary heart into the room where Lumley still remained, scarcely yet comprehending fully the extent of the evil which had befallen him.

The doctor arrived soon after. The report of some dreadful occurrence had already


reached him through the messenger, but I could not of course satisfy him as to the nature of it. I informed him that Lumley had received a fearful shock, and that circumstances necessitated the departure of his wife, adding that I was willing to remain and do all that was in my power to help him in the emergency.

He was seriously alarmed when he saw the condition to which his patient was reduced. Such a shock as he appeared to have had, acting on his enfeebled frame, was in the last degree dangerous, he said. Could no arrangement be made for his wife to return?

I told him that it was quite impossible.

"Then I am sorry to say, I will not answer for the consequences," he answered. "It is necessary that he should have constant attention such as a wife alone can give. Does Mrs. Lumley know that her absence under the circumstances will endanger his life?"

He seemed to cast some blame on her for her abrupt departure. I could not allow



her to suffer from a misconstruction of this kind. The doctor was a man of high character, so I thought it better that he should know the truth, in which case he might be the better able to advise. As briefly as I could, I told him how matters really stood.

He was terribly shocked. "What a future for her—for both of them!" he said. "I see now that it is impossible for her to return; but her absence may kill him. One knows not what to advise. Can you remain with him?"

"It is the only thing to be done," I replied; "luckily there is no immediate necessity for my return to town."

"The best thing you could do, if he rallies sufficiently, would be to take him there with you. You might get him a good nurse, and, when he is able to move about again, the bustle of London life might do wonders for him. It will never do for him to remain here. I suppose Miss Kean can look after household matters while you are here."

Strangely enough, through all the horrible scene of the morning I had never once thought of this woman. I rang the bell. Dawes answered it.

"Where is Miss Kean?" I asked.


"She left the house with Mr. Cunnyngname an hour ago, sir."

"That confirms my suspicions," I said, in answer to the surprised look of the doctor; "I believe those two were more closely connected than we at all imagined."

I called back Dawes, who had left the room. "Do you know where they are gone?" I asked.

"Well, sir, they went to the station, and George, who drove them down, says they took tickets for London. Mr. Cunnyngname left orders for all their things to be collected and sent on to the cloak-room at Charing Cross."

The doctor took his departure. The day wore slowly on. Lumley spoke but little; he seemed too much overwhelmed by the



fearful shock of the morning. Towards evening he said—

“Holford, do you mind having a bed made up in my room to-night? I cannot be left alone; I am afraid to trust myself. Oh, the villain—the infernal villain!”

He broke out suddenly into a violent fit of sobbing. Never in all my experience had I witnessed a sight so painful; the strong man was so utterly broken down. I assured him that I would not leave him even for an hour.

I waited all the evening in feverish anxiety for some news from Lady Barrington. About nine o'clock a note arrived.


“I have not written before,” she said, “because I felt it so impossible to say what would be the result of this fearful shock, and really I have suffered so much myself that I have not felt equal to the task. I have never left the poor child since the morning, although she has hardly spoken since we drove away from that fatal house. She seems

utterly paralyzed by this fearful calamity. The only wish she has expressed is to get away to her father's house as soon as possible. What a blow this intelligence will be to him ! I intend to go with her as soon as she is able to move, and must prepare the poor old man's mind by a letter. I think this will be the best plan, but really the circumstances are so horrible that one hardly knows what to do for the best. Ada naturally will not see any one before she leaves, not even the other members of our household, and I cannot wonder at it. Will that dreadful man escape without punishment ? Pray let me hear from you. I am anxious about Mr. Lumley, and also about you, for I know what you must have suffered through all this."

I was thankful for even this much of intelligence, and to find that the poor sufferer had not entirely broken down. I got Lumley to his room early that night. He was so completely worn out by the strain his mind had undergone that he soon fell into a heavy sleep.


I sat by the fire for hours before retiring to the temporary bed which had been made up in his room. As I watched the glowing embers, and listened to the heavy breathing from the sleeper, a whole world of thought came crowding upon my mind. I endeavoured to review calmly all the events of the past with which I had become acquainted, and to forecast as far as possible the course of the future.

One thought, in spite of myself, would come into my mind. I knew that she was now free—that there was no positive barrier between us; but the circumstances which had brought this about were so dreadful, that it would be an insult to her for me even to indulge in the thought of asking her to become mine. The calls of friendship, moreover, had imposed a duty on me which I was bound to fulfil, at no matter what sacrifice of self, and there was something horribly repugnant to me in the thought of seeking my own happiness when in so doing I should inflict an additional pang upon him



who seemed by so strange a series of circumstances to be thrown entirely on my care. I was certain this would be her feeling also ; and even if I were disposed to seek my own happiness, under such circumstances I knew I should never induce her to consent, whatever the refusal might cost her. For the present, at least, it would be better not even to see her—indeed, Lady Barrington's words left me no option in the matter ; and I could well understand the feeling which made her shrink from meeting even the family of the kind friend who had taken charge of her in this unparalleled trial.

It is useless dwelling on the next few miserable days. At the end of the third, Lumley suddenly said to me, that he thought Ethel had better be sent to her mother. It had been evident to me from the first that the poor child's presence, and the thought of the position in which she was placed, only augmented his grief, and it was no matter of surprise to me that he seldom saw her.



I sent a note at once to Lady Barrington, and arranged for the child to go that afternoon. In reply, she wrote to say that my intelligence had caused great relief—that Ada was only too anxious to get away, but that she could not find it in her heart to leave without Ethel. A message was sent to me from her, again thanking me for what I had done, and entreating me not to leave Lumley even for a day; but upon this I had already resolved.

Lumley grew more resigned as the days passed by, and his marvellous constitution enabled him to rally from the frightful shock he had undergone in a way that astonished me. I therefore intimated to him my desire that he would accompany me to town, and to my great satisfaction he seemed quite to rejoice at the proposal. It was not to be wondered at—everything about Bradleigh was now suggestive of the past, and I knew that it would be better for both of us to get away as soon as possible.


We had talked but little of the conduct of

that wretched man, Cunnyngahme. It was a subject I could never approach without throwing Lumley into a fearful state of excitement, and I therefore avoided it, although there were many points on which I desired fuller information. The night before we had arranged to leave, however, Lumley himself commenced the subject.

"Holford," he suddenly said, "could I get a divorce?"

The question came upon me so unexpectedly, that I was not prepared to answer; nevertheless, it was a subject which had been in my mind at intervals ever since the fatal revelation had been made. The known character of the woman Lumley had married, Cunnyngahme's intimacy with her, and the hints thrown out by Madame Conneau, made me suspect that the latter had concocted this vile scheme for his own base purposes.

I hastened, however, to assure Lumley that I was ready to assist him in the object he had in view—I could not refuse him, whatever the



sacrifice might be. I could not rest under the suspicion that my help had been denied in order to further my own selfish ends; but, on the other hand, I determined not to proceed in the matter without having a distinct assurance from this wronged and suffering woman that she desired it, and that she would marry him if he were freed from the chains which his early and imprudent marriage had cast about him. All these thoughts passed rapidly through my mind when Lumley put the question to me.

“Have you any reason to suppose her conduct, since your separation, has laid her open to an action?” I at length answered.

“How can I have, when I was not even conscious of her existence?”

“You are aware that you must have very strong grounds for taking such a step?”

“I know it; but since that fellow revealed the deception he has practised on me, many ideas have occurred to me. He could only have had one of two motives in acting as he

did—either to get me completely into his power by causing me to commit a great crime, or to further his own immoral purposes.”

“What object could he have in wishing to entrap you?”

“For the sake of what he could get. It's no use now disguising the fact that his demands have caused an incessant drain on my resources—have in fact almost ruined me, as you know. I believe if he could have accomplished it, he would have endeavoured to persuade me to leave the estates to him. You know I have no relations in the world—not even a cousin.”

“There is one obvious duty which occurs to me, and which should be accomplished without loss of time.”

“I know what you are going to say—to will the property to Ada and her child. I have thought of that; it shall be done to-morrow. And now, will you promise to help me in finding out what my friend—curse him!—


and this woman have been doing all these years?"

"I will do my best."

"You promise?"

"Yes."

I felt that the die was cast, and whatever the result of our inquiries might be, I could not now go back. The long, sad future which I dreaded loomed darkly as ever; but, inexplicable as it seemed, a ray of hope still appeared to penetrate the gloom—a feeling above and apart from all surrounding circumstances. This feeling had been with me often in my darkest moments, ever since my passion had first taken root; and with it now came the soothing thought, that for the present at least there was no sin in my love, and that legally I had as much right to claim her as the unhappy man who sat before me.



CHAPTER IX.

THE BITTERNESS OF DEATH.

THE following evening saw us settled in my chambers in town.

It was evident to us that Cunnyngname had overreached himself. He had concluded that his threat of an action for bigamy would have deterred Lumley from taking any further proceedings, and he doubtless thought he would be left to pursue his career in peace. Indeed, I had myself come to the conclusion at first that this would be the wisest course; but I felt now that if the whole of the villainy of which Lumley had been the victim were brought to light, a jury would at once and unhesitatingly grant him the release he

sought, provided the woman's conduct had been what we supposed.

A proposition I had resolved to make to Lumley before proceeding further in the business came voluntarily from him in the course of the next day.

"Holford," he said, "before we go into this matter, there is one thing I should wish you to do. You will of course understand that my chief, I may say my only object, is to restore Ada to an honourable position, and if possible to hide for ever from Ethel the painful circumstances of her birth. Before we take any further steps, however, I wish you to see Ada and obtain her consent to the course we propose taking. It may be," he continued, in a troubled voice, "that she will not consent to have all these miserable details dragged before the public; she may still refuse to marry me, even if all obstacles are removed—for, God knows, I have caused her terrible unhappiness, and I know how utterly unworthy I am of all her love and devotion."

"It is the very thing I was about to propose. I, too, feel that I can take no active part in it without her consent; but I should have preferred leaving this point to be settled by some sincere friend of her own sex—such as Lady Barrington. It may be painful for her even to see me under such altered circumstances."

"No; I can trust no one but you," he replied. "I must have her decision direct from you; I don't think she will object to see you when she knows your errand."

"Let it be so then. I will go down to-night, and arrange a meeting for to-morrow morning."

Deeply painful as the task was which I had set myself to perform, I was convinced it would be the most satisfactory course for all. I knew that I should not be satisfied to receive her decision except from her own lips. Her exact feeling in the matter must be known before I could proceed, and no one could so well judge of that feeling as I.

Nevertheless, it was the most terrible ordeal which I had yet had to encounter. How we should either of us get through it I could not even imagine, but I dared not shrink from it when I reflected on the results it involved.

Was my whole life to consist of this utter abnegation of self? Was a still more bitter struggle before me in the unseen future? Was the indefinite sensation of hope in some far-off time which still pervaded my breast ever to be realised?

The same afternoon again saw me on the western route, and late in the evening I arrived at the little village in North Devon, close to the vicarage where Mrs. Lumley's father now resided.

I secured quarters at an inn built for the accommodation of tourists, who flocked to the neighbourhood in considerable numbers. Early the following morning I sent a note to the vicar, mentioning that I had come expressly by Lumley's request to have

an interview with his daughter on a subject of the utmost importance, and that he would probably remember my name as a friend of both Mr. and Mrs. Lumley. I mentioned also that I quite felt the probability of her shrinking from an interview even with me under the painful circumstances, but I urged the vital importance of my mission as a reason for his endeavouring to overcome any reluctance she might feel.

Within half an hour an answer was returned—

“MY DEAR SIR,

“My daughter will see you as soon as you can make it convenient to call.

“Yours very sincerely,

“LEONARD GREY.”

On the receipt of this note I at once sallied forth on my way to the vicarage. It was only a quarter of a mile from the inn, lying in one of those wooded combes for which the coast of Devon is so justly famous.

Though so early in the year, the morning was almost like summer. The birds were carolling from the naked tree-tops, the sky was one unbroken canopy of blue, and the lovely glimpses of the sea which appeared here and there as I pursued the winding path down the valley, gave a beauty to the scene which would, under other circumstances, have proved a source of intense enjoyment to me.

In spite of the sad mission which brought me there, the old wild joy at the thought of seeing her came over me as strongly as ever. I hardly dared to think of what was to come; I had not even thought of what I should say to her. I resolved that all should be left to her own decision, and that my course must be guided by that alone.

When I reached the vicarage, and gave my name to the servant, I was shown at once into Mr. Grey's study, where I found him anxiously expecting me.

He was a remarkably venerable-looking

old man, with a wonderfully intellectual forehead and a most benevolent expression. I could not, however, fail to perceive traces of extreme anxiety in his face, which showed me how sore a trial his daughter's terrible position must be to him.

He advanced and shook me warmly by the hand.

"I am very glad indeed to see you, and to thank you personally for all you have done for me. I have long wished to make your acquaintance, for Ada has mentioned you so often, and in such glowing terms, that my curiosity has been quite excited. I only wish we could have met under happier circumstances."

"I fear she has formed too high an estimate of me. I almost hesitate to ask how she is bearing this fearful calamity; I know what it must be to one so sensitive."

"Poor child, poor child! it is indeed a terrible trial. Thank God, the remarkable fortitude she possesses has enabled her to

bear up better than I could ever have hoped. Is it fair to ask the object of your visit? You may easily imagine my extreme anxiety to know everything connected with this sad business."

"I fear I must ask you not to press the question at present. My wish is to speak to your daughter alone; my future course will be guided solely by her decision. She may probably desire to consult you about it; it will be better for it to come from her."

"Very well; she is ready to see you now, and I will take care that you are not interrupted. Will you come with me?"

He led the way up-stairs to a small sitting-room, reminding me somewhat of the well-remembered boudoir at Bradleigh. As we entered the room, Mrs. Lumley rose from a couch by the fire, and came quickly towards me with extended hand. Her father quietly repassed the door, closing it softly behind him. The change in her appearance shocked me greatly. She had evidently undergone

intense suffering. Her face was white and drawn, her eyes sunken, and her lips quivered with uncontrollable emotion as she essayed to speak. I saw that the effort was too much for her. Without a word, I quietly led her to a seat by the fire and sat down beside her.

"I have come to bring you a little gleam of hope," I said.

"Oh, no, no! that can never be. Whichever way I turn, all is darkness; do not attempt to offer consolation where any future happiness is so impossible."

"You mistake me. I would not insult you by any commonplace words of sympathy unless I had something to propose which may yet bring you comparative peace."

She shook her head sadly.

"Nothing can remove the stigma of the past. Should this ever be known—and I fear it must be—I must remain a despised and degraded woman for the rest of my days."

"Forgive me, but your mind has been overborne, and you take too gloomy a view of things. I am here to make a proposal which may lead to your restoration to your former position; when that is accomplished, who can blame you for the evils of the past?—evils over which you had no possible control."

"I do not understand you. How is it possible to restore me to my former position? It cannot be while—while that woman lives."

A shudder ran through her frame as she said the last words. I knew what it cost her even to talk to me on the subject. I went on quickly.

"We think it possible that Lumley may get a divorce."

"You forget how I am situated," she answered. "How could I bear to have all these miserable details dragged into light? Better for me to end my wretched existence here."

She turned away, covering her face with

her hands, and rocking herself to and fro in the intensity of her sufferings. I took her hand in mine, but she withdrew it with a hasty action.


"No, no!" she exclaimed; "do not touch me—it is pollution to one like you."

"You must not, shall not, talk in that way," I answered. "Your mind and judgment are warped; you do not know what you say. Can you not understand the intense pain you inflict on me by those words? Think of what I must suffer if you will not listen to me, when you know I would willingly lay down my life to serve you."

She turned quickly round, looking me full in the face.

"You love me still, in spite of all this horrible revelation?"

"Love you, Ada!—if you doubt that, you will drive me mad! Deeply, devotedly as I loved you before, my love was a shadow compared to that which I feel for you now in the midst of this deep affliction. Oh, my



darling, you surely never could have doubted that!"

She turned towards me with outstretched arms, and in another moment I had caught her to my heart.

"Oh, I can bear anything now!" she murmured; "it was the horrible, deadly thought that you would despise me that drove me mad. Oh, bless you for your loving words; you do not know what they are to me!"

She lay helpless upon my breast; her head thrown back, her eyes closed, but with a sweet, sad smile on her face, which haunts me to this day. Heaven pardon me for the weakness of that moment!—rectitude, honour, friendship vanished. I lived only for her love. I felt that all must be sacrificed to my unconquerable passion. I breathed burning words into her ear as she lay motionless in my arms.

"My darling, there is now no bar between us except of our own making. If you will

consent to be my wife, we will leave this country, and all the misery you have known, and in another land we can begin a new life, where no one can know of the past, and where there will be nothing to remind you of this dark time. Will you consent?"


She gave a long sigh, and slowly drew herself away from my arms. Then she fixed her large dark eyes upon me almost reproachfully.

"Let me entreat you not to tempt me! You do not know how weak I am. How can I let you be so false to yourself and to him?" At those words my senses seemed to return to me, and the treachery of which I had been guilty flashed upon me with overwhelming force. She went on—"The thought that you love me still is unspeakably dear to me; it has made me feel able to bear anything, except the thought that I have tempted you from the paths of honour and rectitude. Forgive me, but it was so sweet to hear such words of love in the midst of this bitter trial.

Now let us both be strong and brave. Tell me what you were going to propose."

I felt that she was my better angel still. My mind grew calmer as I listened to her earnest words. I related to her as calmly as I could all that had passed between Lumley and myself, and told her that our future course would be guided by her decision.

She sat silent a long time ; at last she said — "It is useless to deny that I look forward to a return to my old life with indescribable dread. I never can feel—I never have felt—that love which alone can insure happiness in married life. I know too well now what it is to live without it; and the long, hopeless future which lies before me is dreadful to contemplate. It is true I feel drawn to Geoffrey by the strongest ties of sympathy; sorrow for all he has suffered, and commiseration for him in his shattered state of health, make me turn to him more than I have ever done before; still it is a fearful future for me, without love and without hope."



She paused a moment, and then turned to me. "Tell me what you think I ought to do," she asked.

"You must not ask me," I replied. "Whatever you decide on I will abide by; but I cannot advise impartially—my own feelings are too much involved. In urging you to one course, I am false to friendship; in advising the other, I put away all hope from myself for ever."

"I fear you do not quite know me now," she said. "Do not, I entreat you, think me cold or unkind in what I am going to say, but even if Geoffrey does not gain the release he seeks, it is impossible for me to regard him in any other light than as my husband. The vows I took at the altar—in ignorance of the barrier which existed between us—are as sacred to me as if he had been a free man. While he lives, I could not marry another—I should feel I had committed a crime."

There was a decision in her tone which



almost chilled me. On the impulse of the moment I said, "Is it possible you have ceased to love me as you did?"


She turned in an instant, and clasped her hands appealingly before me.

"Oh, in pity do not say that! Whatever happens, never doubt me! I can bear anything but that. Heaven knows I only wish to do what is right!"

"Forgive me," I replied, "I will never doubt you again; I will strive with all my heart and soul to help you."

"Thank you for those words. I know how you can help and strengthen me, and how sorely I need it. If you would only tell me what I ought to do, I should feel more strength to do it."

It was only one more struggle added to the many I had already undergone. "I will tell you, then, what I think you ought to do," I answered. "If Lumley is able to get this divorce, I—I think you ought to marry him; if not for his sake, at least for the sake of your child."



The words seemed to choke me as I uttered them—it was like passing a sentence of death on myself. She knew what I suffered. She took my hand silently. After a pause she said—

“I know well what it has cost you to say those words, and I bless you for your nobleness in saying them. I feel their truth for Ethel's sake, and I feel, too, that it would seem a base desertion of poor Geoffrey to refuse him now. He has atoned for much of his past indifference, and he has suffered greatly. With these feelings in our hearts—much as we love each other—we could not be happy, even if we were together. Am I not right?”

“I cannot answer you. My heart seems torn asunder. Oh, it is a cruel, cruel fate!”

“Hush! hush! Where is your promise to help me? Where is your conviction that the future would yet bring brightness?”

“Gone, gone!” I cried; “I feel utterly lost and hopeless!”

"This is too dreadful. What can I say to you? How can I comfort you?"

"You cannot. I own the truth of what you say; I know that you are right; and yet I have no strength to face the future without you."

I sank back in my chair. Every ray of fortitude seemed to vanish from my mind. I closed my eyes in speechless agony.

I felt her soft arms about me, and her lips pressed upon my forehead. "There is no sin in it now, at least," she said. "Oh, Cecil, for my sake, for the sake of right and truth, look up, and do not drive me quite to despair."

She sank down beside me. I held her once more in my arms, feeling that it was for the last time. For many minutes neither moved nor spoke. When, at last, I rose and put her gently from me, my whole frame seemed turned to stone.

"Ada," I said, "I will do all you wish, but unless the time should come when I can honestly claim you for my own, we must not

meet again—such struggles as these will kill me!”

“Better so,” she replied ; “I too feel that I cannot bear it.”

“At all times, and under all circumstances, you know my heart—it can never change. I will help you to do what we both feel is right, and I can only pray to God to give us both strength to bear it.”

I turned away, and passed the doorway. I heard one low moan issue from her lips. I turned and saw that she had sunk forward on the table, with her face buried in her hands. I dared not return—I could do nothing to comfort her—but my resolve was made. “Never again,” I muttered, “never again, unless she can be mine for ever!” Then I closed the door, and passed on towards the staircase.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

ON the landing I paused to recover myself before meeting her father. I had overestimated my fortitude in entering upon this interview. The events of the last few days had been so rapid—so full of feverish action—that they appeared in a manner to have blunted the acute feelings which had so long filled my heart. Brought face to face with her once more, these feelings returned with tenfold power; and I firmly believe to this day, that, but for her strength of mind, I should have yielded to the temptation of that moment in spite of myself.

I passed down the stairs to the study,

where I expected to find Mr. Grey. To my inexpressible relief he was absent, having been suddenly summoned to a sick-bed near at hand. He had left a message to say he should be back within half an hour, and that he hoped I should stay for luncheon, if not for a longer time.

I was too firmly impressed by the necessity of at once leaving the house to accede to this. I wrote a hasty note, saying that my return to town as speedily as possible was imperative, and that he would learn all that was necessary from his daughter. I added that I hoped, at some time or other, to meet him again under happier circumstances. Then I hastily left the house and returned to the inn, fearing that anything might occur to keep me in the place one moment longer than was necessary. My sufferings had now reached their climax—anything was better than the torture of mind these partings cost me. What to do, or where to turn, when all this was over, I did not care to think. Even the

thought of my political and literary pursuits was becoming, in the last degree, distasteful to me, and I could gain no comfort, whichever way I turned.

That evening found me again in town, and rejoicing Lumley's heart by the information that his request had been granted. We resolved to institute the closest inquiries at once, so as to ascertain what had been the conduct of his wife for the last five years.

Three days after I was again at Vevay, where I sought the first opportunity of an interview with Madame Conneau. I told her plainly this time that I had come with a fixed purpose, in which her assistance was required, and offered her a sum, which was a small fortune to one in her position, if she could give me any information which would lead to the end we desired.

The proposal removed all her scruples, and she imparted some information which would, I knew, be regarded as incontrovertible evidence when the case came into court. I

arranged with her to start for England the moment we required her, and I then returned home without loss of time.

On my arrival, I learnt that Lumley had received information from the Private Inquiries Office, to which we had applied, which still further strengthened our case; and, it seemed to me, there could now be no question that an understanding had existed between Cunnyngame and this woman even before her marriage with Lumley; and there was no doubt whatever as to their immoral relations with each other since. It appeared to be a regularly concerted scheme, by which Lumley had been entrapped.

We agreed that it was better not to proceed against Cunnyngame on any other ground. In adopting this course there was a probability that no exposure of Lumley's secrets would take place; and this we were, of course, only too anxious to avoid. We had ascertained that Cunnyngame had not left London, and in due course notice of the action was served

in a formal manner. Within a day or two we received notice that if we persisted, a counter-charge of cruelty and desertion would be brought; and it was intimated that the fact of Lumley's having married another woman would cause the action to lapse; and that it would be much more to his interest not to prosecute his suit. We did not, however, fear the result, and remained steadfast in our determination to proceed.

The days passed rapidly by until they brought us within a week of the time fixed for the petition to be heard. The same stagnation of feeling which had come upon me on leaving the vicarage, still remained. I busied myself with all the details of the approaching action with almost as much calmness as if I had no immediate interest in the matter. I never looked to the future. Whatever the result of the trial might be, it was evident that, with the feeling Ada entertained, it would not bring her nearer to me; and I did not care to think of the future with-

out her. If at times a thought of what was to follow when all the coming excitement was past flitted across my mind, I shrank from it with a feeling of dread impossible to describe. I well knew that the reaction would be terrible; but strength was, in some way, mercifully sent to me during this period, which carried me through the duties I had to perform.

Lumley and I had stayed late at the club one night, and we strolled home quietly, talking over the one topic which was always uppermost in our minds. We had referred to the extreme anxiety which we had heard Cunnyngname felt to prevent the matter coming into court. All sorts of proposals had been made through his solicitor; but we had adhered firmly to the course upon which we had decided at the outset, feeling confident of victory.

"One would think," observed Lumley, "that if he were really fond of the woman, he would be only too anxious for me to

succeed. He must have had enough from me to keep him comfortably for the rest of his days."

"I can imagine that between them they have easily managed to absorb all that," I rejoined. "As long as she is your wife, she would have a claim on you, unless her misconduct is brought home to her. He knows this well enough. In all probability, too, he has been calculating on your weak state of health. As you have generally been neglectful of business matters, the chances are he does not anticipate your making a fresh will, and thinks that, in the event of your dying, that woman would quietly come into possession of the estates. This is by no means unlikely, for I presume it is a matter you would have delayed until after the trial, if I had not suggested your doing it at once."

"I'm not so sure of that. I have grown much more prudent of late, and had turned the matter over in my mind before you

mentioned it. No doubt that fellow thinks as you say. Well, if I should make my exit suddenly, he will be baulked in that, at any rate. It is more than probable, however, that the one thing he most desires at the present moment is my death, and the one thing he most objects to is a divorce."

We had reached the door as he said this. I opened it with my latch-key, and stepped aside, to let Lumley pass in.

As I did so, a low moan caught my ear. I turned in the direction whence it proceeded, and saw a woman leaning, as if in pain, against the area railings, about twenty yards from where we stood.

I hastened towards her, followed by Lumley. When we got quite close to her, she suddenly started up, darted across the road, and disappeared round the corner, by the Athenæum Club.

We both stood looking after her in amazement.

"Mad, or drunk!" said Lumley. "What's

the matter with you, Holford? Do you meditate a pursuit?"

"Lumley, did you notice anything about her figure?"

"No. I hardly saw her. She went so fast. What do you mean?"

"I could have sworn it was Miss Kean."

"Nonsense! What would she do here at this time of night?"

"Of course I know it could not be. But it was uncommonly like her. Why, you left the door open, Lumley. An unsafe proceeding. It's lucky there was no one about."

We went in, and ascended to my chambers. I had told my man not to wait up for me. We seated ourselves in easy-chairs by the fire, lit our cigars, and went on with our chat.

"By the way, who is that Miss Kean, Lumley?" I asked, still haunted by the figure I had seen in the street.

"Don't you know? I thought you would

have discovered that long ago. She's Dick's sister — his half-sister he calls her, but I believe that's an invention. There's no doubt in my mind now that he's had occasion to change his name more than once, so he couldn't very well call her his sister. For all that, I believe she is."

"She appears to be completely under his thumb."

"Well, her living is dependent upon it, poor soul! She hasn't a rap in the world. They were left orphans at an early age, and have lived by their wits ever since. When I first knew Dick, he was in flourishing circumstances, and was looked on as rather a swell. I'm compelled to confess this took me in. I little thought what a vagabond he would prove."

"Did you know him long before your marriage?"

"Not long; it was chiefly his fault that I married at all; but, of course, I see now it was a plant. If ever any poor devil has

been victimised in every way, I have. I wish I had never had that first quarrel with you, Holford!"

"I wish from my soul you hadn't. But it's no good lamenting now; we must hope for better days to come."

We talked on for some time. An unaccountable depression seemed to be over Lumley, in spite of the hopeful prospects before him. I could not help feeling infected with his despondency.

When I had said good night at the door of his room, he turned and called me back.

"Holford," he said, speaking in a low, earnest tone, "if anything should happen to me, you'll look after Ada and the child, won't you?"

"Why, what's come to you to-night, Lumley? You're better in health than you have been for some time. Why should you fear anything happening to you?"

"I'm only supposing anything should. You'll promise that, won't you?"

"Of course I will. I feel too deep an interest in them ever to let them be anything but my first care."

"Thanks, old man!" he said, in the familiar tone of former days. "I shall rely on you. Good night!"

He grasped my hand again warmly. As I turned to go, he said laughingly, "You'd have made a first-rate husband for Ada. You'd suit her fifty times better than I do, Holford. If I get the chance, though, I'll be a better husband to her in future, God bless her!"

He went into his room as he uttered these words, and I passed on to my own. The gulf between me and future happiness seemed wider than ever, but I felt thankful that she at least would have a better chance of happiness in the time to come.

My sleep was sound during the few hours that remained of the night. Early in the morning I was awakened by the sudden opening of my bedroom door, and a quick

step on the floor. Carter was usually so noiseless that I started up.

"For God's sake, come with me, sir—something dreadful has happened!" he gasped.

"What is it?" I exclaimed, hurrying out of bed and throwing on some clothes.

He was gone again, almost before I had spoken. I hurried after him, and saw him standing undecided outside Lumley's room, with two maid servants, white and speechless with terror, by his side.

Carter appeared also to have lost the power of speech. He stood pointing to the door, with wide, horror-stricken eyes.

I rushed into the room, and over to the bedside. Lumley lay on his back, with his eyes wide open, and his motionless face the colour of the pillow upon which he lay. There was no need for a second glance—he was dead!

CHAPTER XI.

IN CUSTODY.

MECHANICALLY I passed my hand under the bed-clothes and placed it upon his heart. I drew it back hastily. The shirt was saturated with blood, which had oozed from a deep wound in the breast, right above the region of the heart.

I started back in horror "What does this mean?" I cried. "Who has been here?"

Carter had followed me into the room. He spoke in a scared whisper.

"This is worse than I thought, sir. I fancied he was dead when I saw his face just now; but this is murder!"

"Get a policeman at once, and do not let a

soul leave the house. I will guard the door myself."

Carter left the room. I felt at once the necessity of leaving everything exactly in the same state until the police arrived. I followed Carter from the room, locking the door behind me, and descended to the hall door.

By this time all the household were aroused. The ground floor was let to a professional man, and only occupied by day. I occupied the first and second floors; and the mistress of the house, a widow, with the maid-servants of the establishment, were domiciled in the upper rooms. Carter and myself were usually the only men on the premises at night.

I felt stunned and bewildered by the sudden horror which had fallen upon the house. As I stood waiting in the hall, the recollection of the woman we had seen the night before suddenly flashed upon my mind, and sent a thrill through my frame. That likeness to Miss Kean which had struck me so forcibly

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—was it possible that she had really been there, and could I connect her in any way with the foul deed which had been perpetrated? Then followed another thought—the suddenness with which she rushed away as we approached—the door left open. Good heaven! was it a ruse to get us to leave the door unguarded for a moment, so that the murderer might enter unobserved—and was that murderer her brother, Dick Cunnyng-hame? I sickened at the bare supposition. However bad my opinion of him might be, I could not believe him guilty of so foul a crime. I resolved, however, to bear these facts in mind, and, if need be, to follow up the clue they thus afforded.

It was but a short distance to Scotland Yard, and in a few minutes Carter returned with an inspector and two policemen. I related to them as calmly as I could what had occurred, and, leaving one man in possession of the door, we ascended to the rooms where Lumley lay. The landlady, scared and trembling,

accompanied us, the maids still hanging about the stairs in abject terror.

With the calmness of a man accustomed to scenes of violence, the inspector approached the bed. He looked carefully at the body, and then turned down the bed-clothes to observe the wound.

"Has any one touched the bed-clothes?" he suddenly asked.

"Nothing has been disarranged," I replied. "The moment I found he was dead, I saw the necessity of leaving everything untouched."

"Quite right, sir. It could not be suicide, as the clothes were arranged so carefully over the wound. This is murder!"

At this moment a sudden exclamation came from Carter. He was standing near the foot of the bed, and he stooped and picked up something.

"The case of your Japanese knife, sir!" he said, holding it out to me.

I looked at it in amazement. It was the case of a knife with a quaint inlaid bone

handle, which was usually among a few curiosities on my bedroom mantelpiece. Mechanically I took it from him. "How very strange!" I said; "how on earth could it get here? It is certainly the one belonging to my room."

I raised my eyes, and found those of the inspector fixed on me in a scrutinizing manner.

"I don't wish you to say anything that may criminate yourself, sir; but is that the case of a knife belonging to you?"

"Criminate myself!" I repeated; "what on earth do you mean? This case certainly belongs to me, but how it came here I am at a loss to imagine."

The inspector stepped outside the door a moment. I looked round the room for the first time since I had entered it. The drawers were open, and their contents scattered about the floor. The watch and jewels usually on the dressing-table were gone—the motive had evidently been plunder. I felt somewhat relieved.

We proceeded to examine the room for traces of the murderer, but there were none. Some few minutes were occupied in doing this, at the end of that time two men entered the room. One was another inspector, the other was a surgeon who had been summoned from a few doors off. A few words briefly explained matters to the latter. He approached the bed, and turning down the clothes, unfastened the night-shirt and laid bare the breast. He examined it attentively.

"A wound made by a sharp one-edged knife of some kind," he said.

"Would it be likely to correspond to that?" asked the inspector, producing the case which Carter had picked up.

The surgeon took the case, and compared it carefully with the wound. "The weapon which inflicted the wound would fit this case exactly," he said.

The inspector made a note of this, and then said to me, "Will you be good enough to

say who the gentleman is, and tell me all you know about the business?"

I related in a few words all that had happened—my return home with Lumley the previous night, our parting at his bedroom door, and the fact of my being aroused by Carter in the morning; all of which facts were carefully noted down. I reserved for the present the incident concerning the woman we had seen outside.

"Then, sir," said the inspector, "you were the last person that saw him alive?"

"I was the last person who saw him before he entered his room," I replied.

"And you were the first that found him this morning?" he continued, turning to Carter.

"I saw him lying, as I thought, wide awake, this morning when I entered the room; but noticing something queer in his face, I came nearer, and saw that he was dead—or I fancied so."

"And then?"

"Then I rushed out and roused master. One of the maids was on the stairs, and I told her something dreadful had happened, but I didn't know what. She ran off at once to her mistress."

"Who was the first down-stairs this morning?"

"Jane, I believe."

"The young woman at the door there?"

"Yes."

"Well, gentlemen," continued the inspector, "we can do no good by stopping in this room. It's a bad business. You must of course understand, sir," he said, turning to me, "that we are in possession of the house, and it's our duty to search it; meanwhile, no one will be allowed to leave it."

One of the maids was sent to show the officers through the rooms. I descended to the sitting-rooms, utterly overcome by the horrible deed which had been perpetrated.

I could not realise it. Poor Lumley's last words came back to me with overwhelming

force, together with the recollection of the presentiment which seemed to have hung over him the night before. Then my thoughts recurred to the singular circumstances of that knife-case being found in the room, and with a feeling that seemed to chill my blood, I recalled the police officer's suspicious glance.

"It is not possible the man can have the audacity to suspect me!" I thought.

The notion seemed to me too absurd; but I well knew, from my long practice, that the law was no respecter of persons in a case like this, and a certain amount of suspicion must fall on the whole household.

Presently the officers entered the room, followed by Carter looking more scared than ever. One of them advanced to me; as he did so, I saw that he held in his hand the knife belonging to the case which had been picked up.

"I am sorry to be obliged to perform a disagreeable duty, sir; but this knife was

found under your bed. I have no doubt you can explain it all; but it is my duty to say that you must consider yourself in custody."

CHAPTER XII.

ANXIOUS HOURS.

I SHUDDER even now to write of what followed. The accusation was succeeded by an examination before a police magistrate. He happened to be an acquaintance of my own, and was inexpressibly shocked when he heard the accusation which was brought against me. It gave him the greatest pain, he said, to proceed to extremities; but in the face of the evidence before him, he had no option but to remand me, and the same evening I was lodged in the House of Detention.

My partner had of course come to me when the first intelligence reached him, and had remained with me through the day. Before

I would even converse on the means to be adopted for my defence there was one duty I was determined to perform—that was, to send a special messenger to Mr. Grey, to inform him of what had occurred before the intelligence could possibly reach their neighbourhood by means of the papers. I wrote a long letter to him, conveying the whole of the horrible circumstances, but begging him, for the present at least, to conceal from his daughter the fact of my being in custody on such a fearful charge, and to keep all newspapers from her as far as possible. I hoped that a day or two would witness my release, in which case she need never know of what I had been accused. My letter was dispatched by a special messenger the same evening, so that there might be no doubt about its safe delivery, and it would of course be understood that the necessity of immediate inquiry as to the perpetrator of the foul deed would prevent my leaving town myself.

Having dispatched this letter, I had leisure

to sit down and consider the position in which I was placed. The terrible excitement of the day, the rapid succession of events, had prevented my thinking very deeply, and up to this time I never for a moment anticipated any difficulty in freeing myself from the awful charge when the matter was fairly gone into. The more I reflected, however, the more serious my position appeared. There was the damning fact staring me in the face that I had been the last person with poor Lumley on the night previous to the murder, and that we had been alone for hours, so that no one could possibly know what had passed between us. Then there was the still more significant fact that the deed had been perpetrated with a weapon belonging to me, which was always kept in my room, and which was found concealed in the room after the murder. The whole affair had been planned with such consummate villainy, that I felt convinced Cunnyngname was the culprit. I knew he hated me—that he had done so from the first

—and to screen himself, and draw suspicion on me, he had adopted this vile scheme. The whole thing was as clear to me as noonday. That woman had drawn us away from the door to enable him to enter the house. When we were fast asleep he must have stolen into my room, possibly intending to possess himself of one of my razors, and by the dim gas-light, which I always kept burning, he must have seen the weapon he had used; possessing himself of it, he must then have entered Lumley's room and struck the fatal blow, which, from the medical testimony, had probably caused immediate death. He must next have secured about his person every article of value he could carry off, returned to my room, secreted the knife under the bed, and departed, congratulating himself that his work was complete, and that not a shadow of suspicion could reach him.

Every circumstance militated against me. It would be inferred that if I were guilty, I had purposely disarranged the room to avert

suspicion from myself, and it would never be believed, unless the whole of the circumstances were known, that a man who had entered the house to perpetrate murder and robbery would run the risk of entering my room twice, merely to avert suspicion from himself. The chief points in my favour in the eyes of the magistrate were the utter absence of motive and my calmness before the accusation was made; the latter point especially seemed to impress very forcibly the matter-of-fact police inspector.

Like most other criminals, however, Cunnynghame had overreached himself; he had not calculated on my having recognised his sister—for I now felt convinced it was Miss Kean whom I had seen—and he had evidently not calculated on Lumley's having made a will in favour of Ada and her child. He had played for a high stake, but had miscalculated the chances. He considered that by Lumley's death the woman who was now his constant companion would quietly


step into possession of some fine estates, and he himself would avoid the unpleasantly dangerous proceeding (considering his antecedents) of having to make his appearance in a public court, as by this act alone could he hope to prevent a decree being granted.

In the midst of my reflections there was one point which again and again recurred to me, and filled my mind with the keenest anxiety. The absence of motive had been dwelt upon strongly in the course of the examination; but if this fiend, Cunnyngahme, should, in some underhand way, make known the fact that my unhappy passion had once caused a serious breach between me and Lumley, I felt that my chance of escape would indeed be small. A chill of positive terror ran through my frame when I thought of this, and that the only one who could prove that all feeling of bitterness on this score had passed was now a helpless corpse. Would this villain be satisfied to leave his work where it was, and trust to chance for

the rest, or would he make my doom more sure, and, at the same time, drag down the woman he had so cruelly wronged, by a repetition of his former charge?

I sank faint and exhausted on my couch as I thought of this, and for a time hope seemed to desert me. I could not, however, believe that so fearful a doom was over me; I would not yield to the thought, but set myself resolutely to work to think out the best mode of freeing myself, and bringing this fellow home to justice.

The one solitary clue I possessed was the recognition of Miss Kean. On this neither she nor Cunnyngname had probably calculated, considering the darkness of the night and the rapidity of her movements. I decided that she must be found before any steps could be taken to fix the guilt on the man I suspected; but here again a difficulty confronted me. If driven to extremities, both she and Cunnyngname would, for certain, reveal the whole story of the past, which, in



connection with the other suspicious circumstances, would be sure to condemn me, while my statement of having found her in the street on the night of the murder, unsupported by any other testimony, would be considered in the last degree wild and improbable. How bitterly I regretted that there had been no other witness of this encounter! The one man who could testify to its truth was himself the victim of the horrid scheme in which this woman was a chief agent.

It was possible—I hoped for the sake of humanity it was so—that she might not have been aware of the full extent of the crime her brother meditated. She might have been made to believe that plunder was his only object. Bad as my opinion of her was, I could hardly bring myself to believe that she could have absolutely known he had contemplated so dark a crime.

According to prison rules, Redding was obliged to leave me comparatively early, and the long hours of that night were the heaviest

I had ever known. As early as possible the next morning Redding returned, accompanied, at my request, by Dawkins.

They brought the morning papers, which were filled with the details of the crime and of my arrest. The usual platitudes on the mysterious workings of Providence which could reduce a man of comparative eminence to such a position as mine, were of course indulged in. Although not venturing to pronounce me guilty, they considered the circumstances more than suspicious, but I could not fail to remark that they one and all dwelt on the utter absence of motive as a strong point in my favour.

As soon as we had fairly entered on the subject, I turned to Redding and said—"Redding, I have, as you may imagine, thought long and deeply on the position in which I am placed, and am compelled to confess that there is ground for more than suspicion. I wish to ask you, however, in the first place, whether you think me guilty?"

"Good heavens, Holford! how can you for a moment suppose I think you guilty?"

"I wish to put the case more strongly. The magistrate yesterday, and the papers to-day, both dwell upon the absence of all motive as a strong point in my favour. Suppose, for the sake of argument, a motive were suggested, would you still think me innocent?"

"I was about to say that I would not consider you guilty even if I had seen you with the weapon in your hand, about to strike the blow. Without going so far as that, I must say that nothing short of it would make me believe you were the culprit."

I grasped the hand he held out to me. It was indeed a comfort to feel there was at least one friend who had such firm faith in me.

"Now, Mr. Dawkins," I said, "you have heard the opinion my friend entertains of me. I don't ask you to share in that opinion. It is your duty to be guided by the weight of

evidence alone, to put aside feeling entirely, even if you had any desire to indulge in that amiable weakness, and to regard everything from an impartial and practical point of view."

Dawkins nodded his head in a manner which indicated that this was his usual mode of proceeding.

"But," I continued, "if I confess to you and to Mr. Redding that a possible motive might have existed—a motive which in some natures, but not in mine, might have even led to the commission of this crime—you will at least admit that I must be tolerably confident in the ultimate result of my innocence to make such a confession voluntarily."

Redding looked up in surprise, and even Dawkins was somewhat moved by these words.

"I don't know what your intention may be, sir," he said, "but if you'll take my advice you won't suggest a motive where none is suspected."

"But it is precisely with the intention of doing so that I requested your attendance here this morning. There was no earthly necessity for me to have suggested the possibility of a motive, unless I had a very strong reason for it. Before going further, however, be good enough to tell me whether what I say to-day will be regarded by you as strictly confidential?"

"Well, sir, as I am not engaged in the case, and there is no possibility of my being called as a witness, there will be no necessity for me to repeat anything you may think proper to tell me. In fact, you may, if you wish, consider that I am acting privately in your interests, as long as you don't call on me to do anything that is contrary to my duty as a police officer. On that condition you may consider your secret as safe with me as it is with yourself."

"That is exactly what I desire," I replied. "Redding, I know I can rely on you. You must now prepare to hear a confession which,

under the circumstances, will startle you ; but I trust in God that it may, with Dawkins's help, lead to my acquittal and the conviction of the real murderer. When I tell you that nothing on earth, except a matter of life and death like this, would make me reveal that secret, you may imagine the extent of the confidence I place in you."

I then narrated to them, as clearly as possible, the circumstances connected with my visit to the Hall, and the accusation which had led to my quarrel with Lumley. I told them the miserable story of the first marriage, described my reconciliation with Lumley, and the fearful disclosures which followed. Then I dwelt strongly on the present position of Cunnyngame in connection with this woman, and ended by declaring my firm conviction that he was the man who had committed the crime, and that it was his wretched sister who had been seen in the street the night before.

Dawkins sat perfectly silent for several

minutes after I had finished my narrative. At length he spoke.

"I'm compelled to confess, sir, that if it was for a moment suspected you had any lingering fancy for the lady at the time of the murder, your life would not be worth a brass farthing. As you've honoured me with your confidence, you may depend on it you won't repent it. With your permission, I should just like to take down the main points of the story."

I recapitulated certain points, concerning which he put some pertinent questions. When he had finished he said—

"You must know as well as I do, sir, that the long rambling story you have told me would be but a lame defence in the face of the evidence against you."

"I admit that. If possible—indeed under any circumstances—I wish to avoid the slightest reference to it, but I knew that it was better to put you in possession of all the facts before asking you to assist me."

"Quite right, sir ; and I only wish everybody who employs us could be brought to make a clean breast of it in the same way ; what a deal of trouble it would save in the end if they cleared the course for us at the outset!"

"I don't quite see the object of all this though, unless you can act upon it in some way," said Redding, who, up to this time, had been listening attentively to the conversation.

"That's what I am coming to," I rejoined "It appears to me that the only possible clue, and one probably unsuspected, is the fact of my having seen that woman near the house at that late hour."

"But how to follow it up?" said Redding. "Situated as you are, it would be looked on as a miserable subterfuge on your unsupported testimony."

"I think, gentlemen," observed Dawkins significantly, "you had better leave that matter to me. I've gone to work on slighter

grounds than that, and sometimes successfully. We won't say anything about that yet, however. It's more than likely, as Mr. Holford saw her that night, other people saw her too before she reached her lodgings, wherever they might be."

"I've thought of that, Dawkins, but if they did, how could she be identified as Miss Kean, unless the people happened to know her?"

Dawkins smiled. "I suppose there's such a thing as a photograph of her somewhere about. Most people are photographed nowadays; and I suppose there'd be somebody who could swear to her as Miss Kean besides yourself."

A light suddenly broke in upon me.

"You mean that if any one saw a woman in Pall Mall at that late hour they could be asked if she at all resembled the photograph which you would show them?"

"That's about it, sir."

"It is excessively unlikely they would have observed her sufficiently for that."

"No matter, it's worth trying—first, by private inquiry among the police; and if that fails, by advertisement."

"Then you would scare the birds away altogether."

"We'll set the trap too securely for that. I suppose you know where they are to be found?"

"No, indeed I do not. All the communications we have had with them have been through their solicitor."

"Then they are to be found. I suppose, sir," he added, after a pause, "you're pretty well convinced now he was the man I was looking for?"

"Well, I imagine there is not much doubt about it."

"No, I should say not, and it will go hard with me if I don't trip up his heels yet. You see, the case stands this way. If I can find any one who saw her near Pall Mall that night, and can get them to identify her by a photograph—supposing we can find one—

that circumstance would be quite sufficient ground for arresting her and her brother, and if once I lay my hand on him I'll undertake to say he doesn't give me the slip again."

"There is no difficulty about a photograph," I said; "I will communicate with a friend who can send me one at once."

My thoughts instantly recurred to Lady Barrington. A request from me that she would obtain the desired photograph from an album which I had often seen on the drawing-room table at the Hall would, I knew, meet with immediate attention. There was no time to lose. Redding dispatched a telegram in my name.

Dawkins took his departure, promising to come again early in the morning, or sooner if he gained any intelligence. Redding and I sat down to consider the line of defence to be adopted.

"The more I reflect, Holford," he said, "the more impossible it appears to me to set

up any defence but your good name. Of course, if we gave the slightest hint of what had occurred between you and Lumley, and the probable motive of this man in committing the deed, it would operate fatally against you instead of in your favour."


"I am quite aware of that ; and, as you say, there is nothing for it but to bring forward as many witnesses as possible to uphold my character. We may conclude there will be no lack of them. In addition to this, we may at least venture to suggest that the murderer possessed himself of my knife to throw suspicion on me."

"I don't agree with you. It is too unlikely a thing for a man to do unless he had some strong desire to involve you, apart from the desire to screen himself. We had better leave that part of the business alone."

"If we cannot offer some explanation of the knife being found concealed under my bed, I fear it will go hard with me," I rejoined, feeling for the first time really desponding.

“Come, come, you must not give way. You must keep up your spirits under all circumstances. There is plenty of time before us, and many things may occur in the meantime to pull you through. We don’t often hang the wrong man nowadays, whatever they did in former years.”

Redding departed, and I was again left to my own sad thoughts, and the contemplation of my dreadful position. The excitement had all passed off, and for the first time I began to feel that there was a possibility of my being unable to clear myself from this fearful charge. I could not bring myself to dwell upon what would follow if it came to this. The thought caused a nameless dread, which those only can realise who have been so situated—and, thank God, they are few and far between. There was one deep cause of thankfulness through it all—the thought that Ada was ignorant of the fearful position in which I was placed. By this time she was aware of the dreadful deed which had been



committed. What would be the effect on her? Would she expect a communication from me? I hoped she would consider that I forbore writing to her from motives of delicacy, and that before she was made aware of the charge against me, my release would have been effected. I could bear anything rather than inflict upon her the additional pang of knowing that I was the inmate of a prison on so foul a charge as murder.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE TRACK.

AS soon as the prison-doors were open the following morning, Dawkins appeared in what, for him, was a state of great excitement.

“I have come to you, sir, before going to Mr. Redding. I am not, as a rule, given to calling things that turn up unexpectedly in the way of evidence, Providential; but if ever a Providential circumstance occurred in this world, it did last night—or, rather, the night of the murder.”

Dawkins sat himself down deliberately on the only vacant chair, and wiped his fore-

head—for he had worked himself into a perspiration.

“For heaven’s sake, tell me quickly, Dawkins!—what is it?”

“Do you happen to know a young gent named Barrington—Mr. Frank Barrington?”


“Certainly; what of him?”

“Only that it is just within the bounds of possibility that your acquaintance with that same young gent may have saved your neck.”

“What on earth do you mean?”

“Well, sir, if you’ll just sit down I’ll tell you. You see, sir, as soon as I left you yesterday I set about making inquiries, with a view to finding out whether any of our men had happened to encounter the female in question on the night of the murder. I didn’t think it probable—in fact, I knew it was next to impossible, because if they had they’d have been bound to have given it in evidence at the police-court—that is, if she’d been seen anywhere near the spot.

However, I thought it just as well to make one or two inquiries; so I goes to one of our inspectors—Wilkins—and I puts the matter to him. I let him know that I was interested in the case, as I wanted to do a little business of my own on the quiet. He promised to help me; and we got a list of the men who were on duty in the neighbourhood, and as soon as we could get hold of any of them, we put the question as to whether they had seen any suspicious female about the neighbourhood of Pall Mall or the Athenæum that night. Not one of them could give us any information about the matter, and I began to think we should have to fall back on advertising and a reward. Well, after this I went home to have a bit of supper and turn the matter over in my mind—I generally find I can turn matters over after supper better than at any other time, especially with a pipe of good tobacco between my teeth, which is a wonderful help when you want to think quietly. Well, sir,



not to keep you in suspense, I had only just lit my pipe and sat down before the fire, when a rap comes at the door; I goes and opens it myself. Who should I see outside but Wilkins. 'Hallo, Wilkins!' I says; 'what's up?'

" 'Well,' he says, 'there's something up which will just suit your book; we've had some information about the female you're in search of.'

" I made Wilkins come inside; for I was a little taken aback by the sudden intelligence, though I didn't want him to see it. You see, sir, I ain't one of them swell detectives you read of in novels, that's always dropping mysterious hints, and never speaking right out when they might, and are always made out to be mere machines, no matter what the circumstances may be; I have my feelings, and I don't mind showing 'em when it don't injure my case. I felt downright glad to hear news of the woman so soon, so I got Wilkins inside to tell me

all about it. It seems that young Mr. Barrington, who is stopping in town, was walking home from a party across St. James's Park on the very night of the murder; he was coming from James Street, Buckingham Gate, and was going to his hotel in Cockspur Street. Just as he turned to come up the steps by the Duke of York's column, he saw a woman running very fast down the steps—she ran so quick, that she stumbled and fell on the broad part of the steps half way down. Mr. Barrington jumped forward and picked her up. There was just enough light from the lamp for him to see her face, and it struck him as very like one he knew. The woman was gone again before he could say a word; but, on recovering a little from the sudden surprise, he stood still, and, to use his own words, he said to himself, 'Why, it was Miss Kean! what on earth is she doing here at this time of night?'

"The young gentleman left town early the next morning for a couple of days' shooting

with a friend in Berkshire. He did not see the account of the murder till yesterday morning, and the mention of your name in connection with it immediately recalled the fact of his having met Miss Kean under such mysterious circumstances on the same night. He hastened up to town at once, feeling sure that his testimony would be of importance, and very sensibly decided on coming at once to Scotland Yard with his information. He laid the affair before Wilkins, who was the first person called in after the murder. He is now gone to Mr. Redding, and will be here with him this morning."

I drew a great sigh of relief as Dawkins concluded his narrative. The clue we required was put into our hands, as the detective said, in a most Providential manner, and it struck me as more than strange that this should have been accomplished by one with whom I was so well acquainted as Frank Barrington.

In half an hour Redding and Frank arrived.

There was a great shaking of hands all round, and we all felt brighter than we had done for the last eight-and-forty hours.

"I'm awfully sorry to see you here, Mr. Holford!" said Frank. "I hope to heaven my information may be of some service! Mr. Redding seems to consider it of great importance; but I cannot quite see now how to bring it to bear upon the case, although, from Miss Kean's known connection with poor Lumley, it must have some weight."

"You are quite sure it was Miss Kean?"
I said.

"Well, I'm as certain as one could be under such peculiar circumstances. I should hardly like to swear it."

My heart sank at these words. Unless he could swear it, the testimony would be of but little value, I thought, and I said as much.

"Allow me to put the matter straight, gentlemen," said Dawkins. "It happens, by the greatest good luck, that both Mr.

Redding and I can prove Mr. Holford mentioned having seen this woman before he had the least idea that this young gent had seen her. If he had mentioned it to us *after*, his evidence would not have gone for much; but coming before, it's of great importance, as it's now two witnesses, both giving independent testimony as to the party having been seen."

"That's true, enough, Dawkins; but unfortunately I am not in a position to give my testimony."

"No, sir; but, please God, you will be before many days. That reminds me we're losing time. Before I go there's one thing I particularly want to know. Do you think, sir, that this Miss Kean saw that you recognised her?"

"I should say the probabilities are she did not. She had her veil down, and it was her figure generally that struck me. Had I recognised her at once, I should naturally have mentioned her name. But it was after

she passed that it occurred to me who she was—the whole thing was so sudden, and I was so unprepared to see her there.”

“That’s exactly my case,” said Frank; “I don’t believe she saw that I recognised her. In falling, I suppose her veil had come partly off, or I should never have known her.”

“So much the better, gentlemen. As long as they don’t know we suspect them, the better chances we shall have of nailing them. The fact of the woman being seen under such suspicious circumstances at that hour is quite ground enough for arresting her if I can find her, and we must hope that will lead to something else. Now then to see if I can put my hand on this party.”

Dawkins and Redding took their departure. The former was to return as soon as any event of importance occurred. Frank volunteered to spend some hours with me. We found it impossible, however, to talk upon any but the one subject, and the time

dragged slowly on. Redding came again in the afternoon. He waited with me until a late hour, but Dawkins did not reappear. Another dreary night passed away. I began to feel terribly impatient for more information.

The next morning Redding came again. He brought a short note from Dawkins to say that, up to the time of writing, he had obtained no satisfactory intelligence, but that he would communicate with us again as soon as he possibly could.

The hours passed wearily away. I began to fear that Dawkins's mission must have failed, and that these people had left the country. Towards evening, however, he arrived, and gave us the following account of his proceedings.

"My first business you see, gentlemen, was to go to Mr. Cunnyngname's solicitors to obtain his address. Knowing who I was, they gave it to me after some little hesitation, but they informed me that it was no

use coming there, as Mr. Cunnyngname had left London for the Continent some days ago, and would not be back until the day before the time fixed for the suit, and now that was of course all at an end. I thanked them for the information, which you may be sure didn't much interfere with my movements. I went at once to the address they had given, which was a house in Somerset Street, Portman Square. A neat housemaid opened the door, and in answer to my inquiry she informed me that Mr. Cunnyngname was away. I asked when he would be back, and she told me that he intended to be away a week or ten days altogether. This was just the answer I wanted, for it naturally led to my asking when he had left. 'Last Friday morning,' she answered. This you see, gentlemen, was three days before the murder. I next said it was of the greatest importance that I should communicate with him; could she give me his address? 'No; she only knew he was gone to the

Continent.' 'Was she quite sure of this?' 'Quite sure, because they went away in a cab to catch the tidal train.' I thought to myself that's not quite conclusive evidence, young woman; but we won't discuss that point. I then said, 'There was a lady of his acquaintance I also wished particularly to see; can you tell me if she went with him?' 'If you mean his sister,' she replied, 'she did.' 'No, I don't mean his sister; another lady — a dark-complexioned lady.' 'Oh, I know who you mean; the lady that used to come here to see his sister: I expect she's gone too, for I heard him tell the cabman to call in Duke Street, and I know that's where she lodged.'

"There was one more point I wished to find out about, but I didn't exactly see how to get at it without suspicion. I hit upon an idea in a few seconds.

"'There was something left in a cab, which I believe belongs to Mr. Cunnyngname,' I said; 'but you don't like to deliver these


things up without you have got some proof that it's to the right party. You didn't happen to notice the number of the cab that they went away in, I suppose? because that would be making pretty sure whether it belonged to him or not.' 'Well, I can't tell you that,' she answered; 'but it was one I fetched from the rank round the corner.' 'Ah, well,' I said, feeling satisfied with the information I had got, 'we can let the matter stand over till he comes back. Good morning, my dear.'

"With that I went to the cab-rank round the corner, for I knew pretty well that a good many cabbies take their place early in the morning on the nearest stand to the mews where they put up. The cabmen were standing talking in a group, so I went up and said, 'Which of you chaps took a gent and a lady to Charing Cross for the tidal train last Friday morning?' 'Where from?' was the answer. 'From Portman Square,' I said. They all of them shook their heads,

but one of them after a minute said, 'I took a gent and *two* ladies from Somerset Street to meet the tidal train one morning last week, but I suppose they wasn't the party you mean?' I stopped a minute, as if I had been wrongly informed, for I felt sure now that I had got the right man. I took good care not to give him a correct description, otherwise he might have said he had when he hadn't. 'What sort of a gent?' I said. 'Light hair, and a bit of a cast in his eye—something of a squint.' 'That's the man,' I said; 'but they told me Portman Square. You're sure he wasn't alone?' 'No; he had two ladies with him. Now I think of it, one got into the cab in Somerset Street, and the other we picked up in Duke Street. I remember it, because the last lady left a small parcel behind, and I had to drive back for it.' 'And they went off by the tidal train?' 'Well, they went in to the platform, because I went after 'em to get my fare, the gent having nothing less than half a sovereign.

I see the ticket in his hand, so I suppose they went.' 'That's a pity,' I said, 'for I wanted to see him particular; but it can't be helped. I suppose you won't mind a drain? What shall it be? Give it a name.' 'Anything you like,' he answered, and we went and had a drop together, for I felt that I had got over this part of my business pretty expeditiously.


"Next I went down to Charing Cross, and there I questioned the porters as to whether they remembered a party answering the description; but, as I expected, they laughed at the idea, and said how could they be expected to remember all the passengers that went so many days ago? I thought to myself, if Mr. Cunynghame, *alias* Saunders, committed the murder on Monday night, it was not very likely he went to Paris on Friday morning. No, that was a little dodge of his. He either didn't go, or else he came back. Turning this matter over in my mind, I thought there would be no harm in my



having a quiet little run down to Folkestone, to see if I could pick up information by the way. It's wonderful how you can pick up information by putting yourself in the way, gentlemen. It's a favourite game of mine to take a little speculative trip of this sort; it don't cost much, and it's wonderful how it succeeds, three times out of four.

"I put myself into the next train to Folkestone, and when I got there I was lucky enough to find the very boat alongside the pier which had crossed last Friday morning. I soon ascertained that no one of the name of Cunnyngname had been among the passengers that day; and this only confirmed my idea that they had not crossed at all. Well, gentlemen, to make a long story short, after inquiring at two or three hotels, I looked in at the Clarendon, and I found that they had been staying there from the Friday to the Monday morning, exactly as I had concluded. I got hold of the porter, who

was an old acquaintance of mine. 'Well, Jim,' I said, 'how are you getting on down here?' 'Pretty much as you do up in the little village, I suspect. What lay are you on this time, Dawkins?' I thought I had better tell him at once; so I described the party, and asked if he remembered what time on Monday they left. 'Why, you mean the party as was going to cross the water, and one of the ladies was took ill just as they got aboard, and so they give it up?' 'That's about the mark, I expect. Now then, can you remember what time they left on Monday?' Jim couldn't recollect; so I went into the house, and found out that their bill was made up to breakfast-time on Monday morning, and nothing was charged after. The question now was to find out where they had gone. Of course, according to the idea I had formed, they must have gone back to town; but I wanted to make sure of this, so that I might not be working on a wrong



tack. I looked at the time-table, and found there was a train at 10.30, which I thought a likely one for them to go by. I couldn't get any certain intelligence, however. Nobody could remember at what time they left, though all remembered their leaving that morning. My only chance now was to work upon the supposition that they did go up by the 10.30, and if that failed, I must take up another line. I came back to London by the next train, and went straight to the man who takes down the numbers and destinations of the cabs as they leave the station. He knows me well enough; so I got a list from him of the cabs that left the station when the 10.30 from Folkestone came in. There were only five; one went to Grosvenor Square, one to Euston Station, one to Hereford Square, and two to the Great Western. I thought now, if they had come up by that train, I had pretty well marked them down. It was not likely they would go to Grosvenor Square, or to Euston, or

the Great Western ; but it was not unlikely they might have taken rooms in Hereford Square. I next ascertained the name of the proprietor of No. 4020, and sent a man to find out the driver, and tell him to come to Scotland Yard to-night at eight o'clock. Meanwhile, gentlemen, I thought I would run over here and let you know what I'd been doing."

A heavy weight seemed lifted from my mind as Dawkins concluded his narrative. I felt certain he was on the right track, and I cordially shook hands with him, and thanked him for all he had done.

"There's one thing very certain," said Redding ; "if we can really prove that Cunnyngghame returned to town on the Monday morning after pretending to leave for the Continent, this, in connection with Barrington having seen Miss Kean on the night of the murder, will be most conclusive evidence against them both, and quite sufficient to insure your discharge, Holford.

All now depends on our finding them there."

"Quite right, sir," said Dawkins. "It won't do to make inquiries till we've got the number of the house from the cabman, and then we must set a watch to see if we've got hold of the right parties. You see, their not having the least idea they're suspected makes them less cautious. I should say the chances are that on the day they named they will return to their old lodgings in Somerset Street, as if they knew nothing about the murder. It was a deep game to go abroad a few days before, wasn't it, gentlemen? But if my inquiries turn out correct, it'll be, as Mr. Redding says, the most damaging bit of evidence I've met with for a long time."

Dawkins took his leave, promising to let me know the result of his inquiries the first thing in the morning. Redding departed soon after, and I was again left to another night of suspense which had become by this

time almost unendurable. I was more hopeful, however, but my nerves were strung up to the highest pitch, as the most important results depended on the events of the next twenty-four hours. I slept but little that night. Soon after daybreak I became so restless that I rose and dressed, and, to make the time pass more quickly, wrote long letters to Lady Barrington and Dudley Grey, who had both written to me, expressing their deepest sympathy. Grey was in the country, or I knew he would have been to see me. I was not sorry for this, however; for, pending the result of Dawkins's proceedings, I did not care to converse much on the subject of the charge against me, except with those who were immediately concerned.

To my surprise and disappointment, Dawkins did not appear in the morning. Redding called in to see if he had been, and then went off to try and gather some information. The hours passed slowly by—noon came and passed—the afternoon was wearing away—

but still no one arrived. I knew that some important business must have detained them, but I had worked myself into such a state of feverish anxiety that I felt half inclined to accuse them of indifference. No one but those who have experienced it can know the wretchedness of a prison cell during such a period of suspense, with the feeling that one could beat out one's life against the bars, in the frantic desire to escape or to know the worst.

Relief, however, was near. At four o'clock came a hurried note from Redding.

"Miss Kean is in custody. Cunnyngname has somehow given them the slip. The woman, in her abject terror, has confessed that her brother entered the house the night of the murder. Thank heaven, you are now safe! I will come soon."

I threw myself on my knees and returned thanks to God with a fervour I had never felt before in all my life. I knew now, from the reaction, what I had been enduring in

the last few miserable days. The lesson it taught me was an enduring one. I saw how slight all my previous trials had been in comparison with the horrible fate which had so recently threatened me, and which, had it not been averted, would have darkened the whole after life of one who was dearer to me than life itself.

CHAPTER XIV.

ACQUITTED.

AT six o'clock Dawkins and my partner both arrived. I was so anxious to hear what had occurred, that I could hardly wait to exchange greetings with them. Dawkins, however, sat down and began in his usual deliberate manner, but not before he had warmly congratulated me on what he called my wonderful escape. He then resumed his narrative.

“You remember, sir, I was to meet the cabman when I left you last night. I questioned him closely as to the parties he had taken to Hereford Square. He didn't remember much about them; there were two or three, he couldn't tell which, and he could not remember the number of the house.

“‘I know that it was a corner house,’ he said, ‘and I could take you to it; but you can’t expect me to recollect the numbers of all the houses I go to in the course of three or four days.’

“‘Well then,’ I said, ‘suppose I jump into the cab and take a couple of shillings’ worth. You don’t object to that, I suppose?’

“‘All right, sir,’ said he; ‘that will be the best way of settling the matter, for you and me too.’

“With that I got into the cab, and we drove down to the square. I told the man not to stop at the house, but just to drive round and notice the number as he went. When we had gone round the square he pulled up, got down from the box, and came to the door.

“‘It’s the house in the corner over the other side of the square,’ he said; ‘No. 22, as well as I could see by this light. However, you can’t mistake it, for it’s the one next to the opening, where there’s a sort of garden.’

"I got out, and seeing no one about, sauntered quietly round and fixed the number of the house, so that there could be no mistake. Then I went to the north side of the square, and seeing a card up a few houses off, rapped at the door and asked what rooms they had to let.

"‘The front room on the ground floor and a bedroom behind,’ was the answer the servant gave.

"‘What are the terms?’

"‘I don’t know—missus will tell you. I’ll call her if you’ll step inside.’

"I stepped inside, and the missus came up. ‘What do you want for your rooms on the ground floor?’ I asked.

"‘If it’s by the week, I want two guineas,’ she replied.

"‘That’s six shillings a day exact,’ I said. ‘Now, I suppose if I was to offer you half a guinea a day as long as I want ’em, if it was for one day or more, you wouldn’t object?’

"She stared at me in surprise. 'I don't know what you mean,' she said.

" 'Well, it's just this,' I said. 'There's a particular reason for my wanting to occupy your rooms for a day or two—one day is likely to be enough. If you like to make the arrangement, I'll come in the first thing to-morrow morning, and pay you half a guinea a day as long as I'm here.'

" 'I shall want a reference.'

" 'You shall have the money—that's the best sort of reference. I'll pay you the half-guinea every morning when I come into the room.'

"The amount seemed to overcome her scruples at letting in this queer way. It was arranged that I was to come at seven the next morning.

"I was there punctual this morning, with Wilkins and two constables in plain clothes. The good lady of the house looked rather frightened at such a formidable party, and evidently suspected our intentions; so I took her on one side, and binding her down to a

solemn promise not to mention the fact, I told her who we were, giving her to understand that the heaviest penalty of the law would fall upon her if she broke her promise.

“The plan I had in my head was this. The row of houses of which No. 22 formed the corner, was separated from the row where I had taken the rooms by an open space of garden, and was at right angles with it; so that, sitting close to the window, the angle was such that I could command a good view of the windows of No. 22. As soon as it got fairly light, I stationed myself at the window, and there I made up my mind to stop till I saw something of the inmates of the house I was watching. Somehow or other, I had made up my mind that the room they occupied was also the ground floor, and it's astonishing how often my surmises turn out to be right—so much so, that it seems to me sometimes like a miracle. Well, the time went on, and there I sat, seeing no one but the servant, who came to the door now and then to take

the milk or the letters, or something of that sort. Wilkins was rather impatient, and was for going to the house at once to ask if Mr. Cunnyngname happened to lodge there; but I knew this wouldn't do. I thought it more than likely that he wouldn't give the name of Cunnyngname to the people of the house, and if he heard any stranger making inquiries in that name, it wouldn't be long before he gave us the slip.

"From time to time I could see people moving about in the room, but nothing distinctly. I never once took my eyes from the house for three hours. At exactly eleven o'clock a face suddenly appeared at the window for a second or two. It was long enough for me. *I saw that I had spotted my man.*

"Our course was now clear. Wilkins and I went over to the house, giving directions to the men to station themselves within sight in case of need. We mounted the steps and rapped at the door, standing close in, so that

we might not be seen. The maid came. 'I suppose the gentleman in the dining-room is within,' I said, as if I had come by appointment, and then walked straight past her, followed by Wilkins. The girl looked rather astonished. We took no notice of that, but opened the dining-room door and entered. Only the two women were there, both with their bonnets on. I knew if there was any commotion that the alarm would be given; so I quietly stepped back again; closed the door, and turned the key. The maid gave a cry, thinking we were thieves; so I just took her by the arm.

"'Look here,' I said, 'I'm a detective officer. Tell me where the gentleman is, and we'll do you no harm; deceive us or make a noise, and I take you to the police-station without more ado.'

"The girl trembled all over. 'If he isn't in the dining-room he must be in his bedroom.'

"'Show us the room; quick!' I said.

"She turned at once and ran up the stairs, we following. She pointed to the door of the back room on the first floor. I opened the door and looked in—it was empty.

"‘Ah! he was always a downy one,’ said Wilkins; ‘he’s done us again!’

"By this time the landlady was up, for she had heard us in the hall. ‘What does all this mean?’ she asked.

"I didn’t answer her, but ran down to the front door and called up the men. Then I said to the landlady, ‘We’re after your dining-room lodger. It’s a serious charge; help us to find him, or it will be the worse for you.’

"‘I saw him go up-stairs two minutes ago. If he’s not in his room I don’t know where he is. For heaven’s sake, what is it?’

"We sent a man down to the back door, and left another in the hall. Then we went up-stairs again, and searched every part of the house. The women in the dining-room were by this time screaming to be let out, but we

took no notice of them. We could see no trace of Cunnyngname, up-stairs or down. I went back into his room, and noticed that the window was partly open. I looked out, and saw at once that we were done. The flat roof of a small back room extended a few feet below. I got out of the window and dropped on to it; then I walked over to the end and looked down. In the soft mould of a flower-bed below I saw two footmarks, and could trace them across the garden to a wooden fence, beyond which was a narrow lane and some fields. I knew then the bird had flown. The man at the back door had seen me, and came out. 'We've made a mess of this job, anyway,' I said; 'he's clean off by this time.' I let myself down by my hands, and then dropped into Mr. Cunnyngname's tracks. We went back into the house; the women were screaming like mad, and the landlady and servant all of a shake. I went into the dining-room, and took Miss Kean by the arm.

“‘Sorry to be disagreeable to a lady,’ I said, ‘but I must trouble you to come along with me, and you better come quietly.’

“She tried to shake me off. ‘How dare you touch me?’ she cried.


“‘You’ll soon find that out,’ I answered. ‘It’s my duty to take you into custody on the charge of being concerned in the murder that was committed in Pall Mall last Monday night.’

“You should have seen the change in her face. She turned quite livid like, and shook so that I was obliged to hold her up. Then she broke out screaming and sobbing.

“‘I didn’t know he was going to do it! he told me he only wanted to get some papers. Oh, for God’s sake, don’t take me away!’

“‘Oh, he was there then, was he?’ I said—for I thought now was the best time to get the truth out of her.

“‘Oh, yes, yes! but I never knew he meant murder. Oh, spare me! I would have cut off my hand rather than have gone, if I



had known it. Oh, what shall I do! what shall I do!’


“She sunk down on her knees, and clasped her hands round mine. I never, in all my days, saw a woman in such mortal terror; I didn’t like to look at her. It occurred to me, too, that she had spoken the truth, and I had a sort of pity for her. They were all in the room and heard her words, and I thought to myself it was pretty well all up with Mr. Cunnyngname when we did lay our hands on him. I tried to quiet the woman; but every time I made any attempt to take her away she broke out again, screaming and sobbing so that I thought all the neighbourhood would be roused.

“‘Now look here,’ I said; ‘it’s no use making all this fuss; your life ain’t in danger, and your brother—if he is your brother—has got off. It’ll be better for you, and for all, if you come quietly.’

“Well, gentlemen, to cut it short, we had a desperate scene with her. For half an hour

or more I thought she would have gone mad ; but at last she wore herself out, and we got her away to the station and locked her up. As soon as ever I could, I telegraphed to all the police-stations for our men to keep a sharp look-out for Cunnyngname. Then I went round to the different railway-stations, and gave instructions for a look-out to be kept there, and tried to pick up some intelligence of him. I knew no time was to be lost, so I wrote a description of him at once, and sent it to all the places round the coast where he would be likely to embark. In fact, everything is done in the way of precaution that can be done ; and, although we have not yet run our fox to earth, I hope you're satisfied we've done our best."

"It was a fortunate day for me when I first met you, Dawkins," I replied ; "and you may rely upon it I shall never forget your zeal. The position in which that wretched woman is placed, and the dark crime which there is now no doubt her brother committed, are too



horrible to contemplate. I suppose there is now no doubt of my release?"

"Of course not," interposed Redding; "the woman's confession alone might not have done, but that, coupled with the fact of her having been seen by you and Barrington on that very night, will form the strongest evidence. You may look upon your release as certain."

The following day I was again brought up on remand. Dawkins, in the clearest manner, deposed to the new facts which had come to light, and the counsel we had engaged dwelt so strongly on the suspicious movements of Cunnyngname at the time of the murder, that this, coupled with Frank Barrington's evidence, was sufficient to satisfy the mind of the presiding magistrate. If anything further were wanting, it was the evidence of the landlady at Hereford Square, who deposed that her lodgers had been in the habit of sitting up until two and three o'clock in the morning ever since they came to her, that

she and the servant always went to bed at eleven, and consequently it would be quite possible for the lodgers to leave the house, even for an hour or two in the middle of the night, without her knowing anything about it. There was no further doubt, however, in the magistrate's mind, and he at once ordered me to be discharged, expressing at the same time his great regret that I had been subjected to the mental and bodily suffering which must have resulted from this horrible accusation.

The case had naturally excited a widespread interest among all classes. When I reached the door, leaning on Redding's arm, a whole host of friends pressed forward to congratulate me, and the large concourse outside were so enthusiastic in their demonstrations, that it was with difficulty we could make our way to Redding's brougham, which was waiting to take us away. No one can know the intense feeling of relief I experienced as we drove away from those gloomy walls; the past few days appeared to

me now like a dreadful nightmare, the intense horror of which I had hardly realised until I found myself once more a free man.

I had not yet thought of our destination, but suddenly an unspeakable repugnance to return to my old house shot through my mind. I turned to Redding—"I can't go back to Pall Mall, Redding," I said.

"Nobody intends you to," he answered; while a smile, which I could not at the time understand, passed over his features. "We are going to my house at Brompton."

"This is thoughtful of you. I never can enter that house again. I have been so absorbed in my own troubles that I have never asked you about poor Lumley."

"They took him down to his own place: he was buried in the family vault—Sir John and some other friends were there. Mr. Grey went over also; but his daughter was of course not there, and, under the dreadful circumstances, no one expected her."

"Poor fellow! it was an awful fate. The

one false step of taking that villain into his confidence has dragged him down ever since. It has blighted his life, and brought him to this fearful end."

In half an hour we arrived at Redding's villa in the Old Brompton Road. We were met in the hall by his pretty young wife, who gave me a most cordial welcome. When the greetings were over, she said, "Will you go into the drawing-room, Mr. Holford? you know the way. We will come to you directly."

I advanced to the well-known door, and entered the room.

A lady in deep mourning was seated on a couch opposite the door, and by her side stood Lady Barrington.

I did not need a second glance; the next moment I held in my arms the one who was dearer to me than all the world, trying to calm the sobs that would break from her in spite of herself, while Lady Barrington stood by with tears of heartfelt sympathy streaming down her honest, affectionate face.

CHAPTER XV.

EXIT DICK CUNNYNGHAME.

It was many minutes before we grew sufficiently calm to converse quietly. Lady Barrington had slipped away after the first cordial greeting, and, in spite of the shadow of the terrible deed which hung over us both, I could not restrain the ineffable joy with which I held to my heart this one woman of all the world who could make me entirely happy, feeling, as I did so, that there was no barrier between us—that nothing but death could ever again separate us from each other's love.

“I have been here from the first,” she said ;
“and oh, what a fearful agony of suspense I

have endured! They would not let me come to you, as they said it would only increase your misery to think that I knew the position in which you were placed. Perhaps it was better; but I did so long to comfort you!"

"But how could you know it? I entreated your father not to tell you, as I hoped to be released so soon."

"He could not conceal it from me. It was such a shock. Poor old man! I saw something fearful had happened, and I assured him that, whatever it was, it would be better to tell me than keep me in suspense. The instant he told me, I sent to Lady Barrington, and begged her to bring me to town. Mr. Redding, with the greatest kindness, insisted on our staying here, where he could best keep us informed of all that occurred."

Her voice sank almost to a whisper as she went on—"I felt, too, that there was another duty before me. I could not let poor Geoffrey be taken away without seeing him once more. It was a fearful end! God knows how hard

I have striven to do my duty to him, and I believe he loved me very dearly."

"I am sure of it. You know he did all in his power to make reparation to you. The property is willed to you and Ethel."

"I know it. Unhappy as my life was at Bradleigh, I feel now that Geoffrey was more sinned against than sinning. I shall always remember him with affection and pity; but I do hope his murderer will not escape the penalty of his crimes."

"It is not likely. They are keeping a sharp look-out for him, and there is little chance of his escape. Do you know poor Geoffrey's last words were of you? There was a strange depression and presentiment over him the previous night, and he said, as I parted from him at his bedroom door—little thinking it was for the last time—'If I get the chance, Holford, I'll make her a better husband in future. God bless her!' Those were his last words."

The tears were streaming down her cheeks,

and for a few minutes I did not interrupt her. Then I said, "It was singular, too, that he made me promise that night, that if anything happened to him, I would take care of you and Ethel. I tried to dispel his gloom, and to reassure him as to his recovery, but it had little effect. He made another remark, too, which seemed to imply, that if anything happened to him he would even wish me to ask you to share your future with me."

I saw the crimson flush stealing over her face as I uttered these words.

"Should you be afraid to trust your future to me?" I said.

She looked up at me with a face so full of perfect love and trust that I needed no other answer.

It was a love to atone for a whole lifetime of care—the love of a true woman! Man may well be content to gain it once in a life, for it is a thing to lift his heart above the cares of earth, and give him a foretaste of the angel-joys to come.

* * * * *

Lady Barrington entered the room. "You are wanted at once," she said. "They do not leave you long in peace."

"What is it?" I asked.

"The detective, I believe. He has important intelligence for you."

I hastened from the room. Dawkins' was in the hall.

"I believe we have run the fox to earth at last, sir. There's a man answering his description lodging in a back attic in Foley Street. And from what Wilkins remembers of him, he is pretty sure he's the man, but he has only seen him once. We intend to lay hold of him to-night if possible."

"There must be no mistake this time, Dawkins. Do you object to my going with you?"

"Well, sir, I didn't like to propose it, but that's exactly what I wanted. You and me are the only people that knows him for certain, and, as you say, we mustn't make a mistake this time."

“What is your plan?”

“Just this. I’ve ascertained that there is an attic to let next to his, only separated from it by a wooden partition. I intend to take the woman of the house into our confidence, and get possession of that room. When we hear him come in we can walk in and take him there and then. This is the only plan; for if he was to see us come into the house, or even hear us coming up the stairs, he’s such a cunning beggar, he might give us the slip again.”

“But he may see or hear us whatever time we go.”

“Stop a bit, sir; they’ve watched him leave the house every evening just after dusk, and he don’t return until eleven o’clock regular. This is what the man says that I’ve put on to watch him. Now he may be mistaken in his man, so we must make sure of this first. ’Tisn’t the first time by many that I’ve been shut up in a attic, separated by a bit of board from the one I’ve been after. A gimlet-hole

in the wood is enough to identify him, and you can easy nail him after. We must set one of our men to watch him out—it won't do for you or me to be seen—then we must take up our quarters, and you may leave the rest to me."

"What time do you propose going?"

"That all depends upon what time he goes out. Where can I find you at eight o'clock, or thereabouts?"

"I'll come to you a little before that hour."

"All right, sir; and I hope before we go to bed again we shall have Mr. Cunnyng-hame safe by the leg, for a bigger villain never earned a rope."

I said little as to my intended expedition, as it was useless to excite alarm, and, moreover, I wished to be sure of our man before I entered into particulars. At the appointed time I looked up Dawkins.

"You're in the nick of time," he said; "the constable I put on to watch has just been

here to say he went out at seven. From his description, I should say he must be the man. Now we had better lose no time, but get on at once. There's a man at the end of the street to warn us if he goes in again."

We drove at once to Foley Street, found from the policeman on watch that Cunnyng-hame had not returned, and went on to the house. We rang the bell, and asked to see the mistress.

In a few minutes we explained our errand. She seemed an honest sort of woman, and was greatly startled, but entered into our arrangements at once. We proceeded upstairs. The room occupied by Cunnyng-hame was a small attic, which had evidently at one time formed one large room with the one next to it; but, for the sake of increasing the number of available rooms for letting, a wooden partition had been erected. The door of Cunnyng-hame's room was locked, but we had no desire to enter it now. We went into the next attic, and Dawkins,

drawing a gimlet from his pocket, immediately proceeded to bore a hole at some little distance above the height of the eye. He then trimmed the rough edges with a small, sharp penknife, so that when standing on a box which we found in the room, by placing the eye close to the hole, a tolerably distinct view was obtained of a considerable portion of the next attic, the partition-boards being very thin.

"Have you had this room occupied since he came here?" inquired Dawkins of the landlady.

"Oh, yes. The last tenant only went out yesterday."

"That's all right. In that case he won't be surprised if we do happen to make a little noise here."

I expressed my surprise that Cunnyngname should have remained in a street where there was comparatively little privacy.

"You see, sir, it isn't the first time he's tried it. He was afraid to get away from

any of the stations, and he was afraid to go into the back slums. He knows, from experience, that the police have their eyes on those places pretty constantly. He never goes out till after dark, and he's safer here than anywhere, or he thinks himself so. Depend upon it, he's up to some scheme for getting away with that woman; but he won't run any risk. You say he comes in about eleven?" he added, addressing the landlady.

"Yes; never before."

"Then if we're here by ten we shall be in plenty of time. I've a little matter to attend to in Cumberland Street that'll just occupy me up to the time. Will you meet me here at ten, sir?"

A sudden thought struck me.

"I shall stay here while you are away, Dawkins."

"There's no need for you to do that, sir. It's a long time to wait."

"Perhaps not; but I prefer doing it to going away."

"Well, sir, as you please. I'll get over my little job as soon as possible, and then return. You'll look for me about ten, or a little before. It's now twenty past eight. While I think of it, just put this inside your waistcoat."

He drew a small revolver from his pocket, and held it out to me.

"There's not the least occasion for it," I said.

"For heaven's sake don't let there be any violence, gentlemen!" said the landlady, looking quite scared.

"I don't expect there'll be any necessity," replied Dawkins; "at the same time I must request you to take it. His is a desperate case, remember; and though he ain't much to look at, he may fight hard."

To satisfy him, I took the pistol, and placed it in the side pocket of my coat. Dawkins then departed, followed by the landlady, and I sat down in the only vacant chair in the room. I had declined a candle, but a small amount of light—just sufficient

to enable me to see—came into the room from a lamp in a neighbouring street, which happened to stand opposite an opening between the houses.

For some minutes I sat reflecting on my novel position. Now that the crisis was at hand, I felt perfectly cool, and I was determined the villain should not escape us this time if it was in my power to prevent it. Dawkins was to bring a constable with him, so that if we had fixed upon the right man there was no chance of failure.

After sitting for a few minutes, I went outside the door and examined the landing. The house was one of those old-fashioned, substantially built ones, which abound in this district. It had a well-staircase, all of stone, except the top flight, and was lighted from a skylight above. There were stone landings also to the three lower flights, but the fourth flight, which was of wood, led up to a sort of gallery with a thin wooden rail, overlooking the whole depth of the house.

The doors of the two attics opened on to this gallery, and were side by side. It was a high house. Looking over the banisters, by the light from the skylight, through which the rising moon was beginning to cast her beams, I could barely discern the stone floor of the hall some sixty feet below.

I returned to the attic, and closed and locked the door, then threw myself at full length on the small iron bedstead, and waited. There was yet an hour and a half to the time of Dawkins's return, and I almost regretted that I had not gone with him, the minutes appeared to pass so slowly by.

It seemed almost an incredible thing at such a moment, but it is probable the excitement I had undergone had exhausted me, for I found myself falling asleep. I did not resist it, for there was yet an hour and a half to the time of Dawkins's return, and I never anticipated dozing for half that time; so I remained still, and allowed the drowsy god to take possession of me.

It seemed to me that my eyes had only been closed a few minutes when I awoke with a start. As I did so, the clock of a neighbouring church began to chime. It chimed the half-hour, and I started up. I must have slept an hour, for half-past eight had chimed just before I fell asleep.

At this moment I heard footsteps below, and the landlady's voice on the stairs.

"I didn't think you'd be in so early, sir. Will you please to take this candle? I'll bring your own directly."

"This one will do quite as well; you need not trouble yourself to bring the other."

There was no mistaking that voice. My pulses seemed to stop as I listened. Then my whole frame burned with anger, and I felt as if I could rush out and seize the villain there and then.

It was fortunate he declined the light. I had noticed a tremulousness in the landlady's voice, and I feared he might notice it too.

My next thought was of Dawkins. How would he get in without suspicion now?

I sat quite still on the edge of the bed and listened with the most intense eagerness.

I heard him enter the next room, and lock the door. At the same moment, a small round ray of light in the upper part of the partition showed me the position of the hole Dawkins had bored.

There was silence for some minutes after he had locked the door—then I heard him moving about the room—then the sound of a lock being turned—then silence again, broken only by a light chinking, like that which is caused by the contact of small pieces of metal.

I could restrain my curiosity no longer. I advanced without making the slightest sound, stepped lightly on to the box, and looked through the hole in the partition. It commanded exactly the part of the room where the villain was seated.

I almost started back, he appeared so close

to me. It seemed as if he must hear my very breath. He was sitting with his face towards me, leaning over a small valise, in which he was packing some rings and jewellery, which I recognised as belonging to poor Lumley—damning evidence of his guilt, if any more were required.

This occupation continued for some minutes. Having wrapped them all in paper and placed them in the valise, he rose and passed on one side, out of my range of vision.

The instant after he was there again, with some light articles of clothing, which he placed in the valise. Again he disappeared.

The next time he returned with a few articles connected with the toilet; these were packed with the rest.

I watched anxiously for his next proceedings. After looking carefully round the room, he closed and locked the valise, and fastened the straps; then he rose and disappeared again.

It had flashed across me, as I watched his

movements, that he was about to depart. It is true they might be only preparations. In any case, I thought, he must be stopped.


I felt thankful that Dawkins had left me the pistol. Mechanically my hand closed upon it in my pocket. The instant after I had double cause to be thankful.

Cunnyngname came into the line of vision once more. This time he had his hat on, and in his hand was a small pistol, which he was examining attentively. I knew that the crisis was at hand.

The next moment he placed the pistol in in his inner breast-pocket, buttoned his coat, and took up the valise.

Without an instant's hesitation I stepped from the box, unlocked the door, and was out on the landing before his door was open. I drew my revolver, and stood opposite the door.

I imagine the noise I made startled him, for there was a dead silence for half a minute or more after I had taken my stand. Then




his door was suddenly thrown open, and we stood face to face.

He started, and leaped back as if he had been shot; then he slammed the door and turned the key.

The gallery was not four feet wide; to my right was a dead wall, behind me the deep well-staircase; to my left, the door of a lumber-closet and the stairs leading down at a right angle to the gallery. The door of my room was, as I have said, next to the one before which I stood. I leaned against the light banisters, pistol in hand. I looked at my watch—it wanted ten minutes to ten.

Dawkins would probably be here in ten minutes—possibly before. How thankful I felt that I had not gone away with him! I almost thought that I should be glad if he did not return, so that I might capture the villain alone.

He could not possibly escape me. I knew that in point of strength I was more than his match; and I could, from my position, be



beforehand with him if he attempted to use his weapon.

The instant after the door was suddenly unlocked. I expected a rush, and stood prepared. It did not come, however. There was a dead silence again for what seemed about half a minute. Then, as quick as thought, the door was thrown open a few inches, and a pistol suddenly protruded.

There was a flash, followed by a sensation as if a rasp had been drawn sharply across my left temple. I felt dazed for a moment, but the instant after I had the villain in my grasp. What passed in the next few seconds was too confused to be distinctly recalled. I know that, following the discharge of the pistol, he had rushed from the room and endeavoured to pass me. I had seized him with both hands, dropping my pistol, which was now useless. Then followed a wild struggle, in which he fought and writhed like a madman. I became conscious that he was endeavouring to force me back against

the frail banister. This brought me to my senses.

With a violent effort I swung him round and got him at arm's length, forcing him suddenly backward.

The weak banister snapped as he came heavily against it. For an instant, I thought we should have both gone over; but I threw forward my foot, and held him there, completely at my mercy.

The instant after, he had seized my left hand in both of his, and with the savage fury of a mad dog had buried his teeth in the flesh. I could not restrain a cry of pain; my arm dropped powerless. In desperation I dug my right hand still more firmly in between his neck-tie and his neck, and gripped him with a grip of iron, forcing my knuckles into his throat.

He was almost choking, but I held on with redoubled energy. The moment after his hand was in his pocket, and I at once suspected his intention.

"You villain!" I said, "if you attempt to use another weapon, I'll hurl you over the stairs!"

He did not reply, but drew a large clasp-knife from his pocket.

My left hand was powerless; I dared not withdraw my right, with which I still held him against the broken rail. At this instant I heard a man's footstep on the stairs below.

"Quick, Dawkins, for God's sake!" I shouted.

"Hold on, sir!—hold on a minute!" was the reply from the second flight.

I heard the footsteps coming up rapidly—I saw an expression of fiendish malice and desperation in Cunnyngahme's face—I saw him attempt to open the knife.

"As sure as death I'll send you backwards if you attempt to use it!" I cried.

The instant after it flashed in the light of the candle which streamed through the doorway behind.

In despair I wrenched my hand free from his collar. As I did so he lost his balance and reeled backwards. The broken banister gave way. He made a frantic effort to clutch my arm, tottered a moment, and then fell headlong.

A deadly sickness came over me as I reeled against the wall. There was a cry from Dawkins on the stairs, and then a dull thud upon the pavement of the hall below.

Recovering myself, I rushed down the stairs. Dawkins and the constable were flying down before me, and the landlady, who had heard the cries, came running up from the kitchen, candle in hand.

Cunnyngame lay on his side, with the blood streaming from his mouth, and his whole frame quivering.

With one deep groan he turned suddenly over on his back; his eyes opened with a fixed, glazed stare; and then—all was still. Dick Cunnyngame's career in this world had stopped for ever!

CHAPTER XVI.

DAWN AT LAST.

MORE than a year had passed away, and I stood once more within the ruins of the old Castle of Unsprunnen, looking on the valley of Lauterbrunnen. The weird trio—the Jungfrau, the Monch, and the Eiger—stood up in the still morning air as they had stood when I saw them last, flushed with the rosy light of morning, sublime in their eternal changelessness.

It was early summer, and even the lesser mountains had not yet thrown aside their winter mantle of snow. The deep roll of the avalanches re-echoed in many a mountain gorge like the diapason of an organ in some

dim cathedral aisle, while the streams that coursed along the valleys and festooned the dark crags were the white-robed choristers chanting their hymns of praise.

I was not alone; Ada was by my side, and little Ethel was disporting among the flowers which grew in wild luxuriance in the field below. Her light laugh, as she chased the early butterfly or rolled in the deep grass, came up to us as we sat in silence on the old grey stones.

“‘I seem to invest it now with a mysterious association which makes me feel that it is in some way connected with happy days to come.’ Do you remember those words, Ada?”

“Shall I ever forget them?” she replied, drawing closer to me. “If I could only have known at that time what intense happiness was in store for me! Let no one despond while there is a Providence above to rule and guide.”

Presently she said, in a lower tone, pointing to little Ethel, “Her future is my only

care. What will she think when she grows up if she should ever know the secret of her birth?"

"Why need she ever know?"

"That horrible woman may reveal it."

"Not she. She has never appeared, never made a claim, although she must have been ignorant of the existence of the will. Rely on it, her dread of being accused of complicity in the murder will keep her effectually out of the way; and the other miserable creature, when her term of transportation expires, will probably stay beyond seas. It is the best thing she can do. No; there is no need to drag all the wretched past into light, and you shall never do it with my consent."

"I shall never do it without," she replied, with a return of her old happy archness.

"You are my tyrant now for evermore."

"For all that, you made me undergo this long term of probation. I wonder you allowed me to come at all."

"You know in your heart of hearts you

thought it right: but now tell me, have you accomplished all you set yourself to do?"

"I have published my book, and waited for the verdict of the critics. I am thankful to say they are not unfavourable, which is something in this carping age. The aim of all criticism nowadays is not so much to analyze the subject as to show the cleverness of the critic. I have brought a whole budget of papers for you to read, and you may consider yourself entitled to at least half the praise for having incited me to action."

"How I shall enjoy reading them! And now tell me about your parliamentary duties."

"They are over; I have resigned my seat."


"Resigned your seat!"

"Yes; like Antony, I have sacrificed my future to a woman. Is that woman ungrateful?"

"Come, come! you must have some other motive; tell me seriously."

"Seriously, then, I felt that it was not fair to my constituents to be so constantly

absent; they have borne with me more than I had any right to expect. I want to travel far and see much with you, and gather materials for more books. If I must tell the truth, I want you by my side in all my occupations. Mine has been such a loveless life that you must forgive my wishing to devote myself to you with all my heart and soul—at least for the present. One of these days, perhaps, when my gentle censor has given me another lecture on the neglect of my talents, as she is pleased to call it, I may, perhaps, be induced to seek the suffrages of some other constituency, or the same, if they will have me. Then, perhaps, with the same love for an incentive, I may become a great minister of state—who knows? My love is so mighty that it enlarges my very nature, and makes me feel able to accomplish all things in the great mental tournament of the age, as the knights of old were moved to doughty deeds for the sake of one loved face. It seems to me



that the love of those olden days was more pure and true than most men feel nowadays, and compassed higher aims."

"Can we not combine the true love of the past with the clearer understanding of the present?"

"We do; for no love could exceed ours. I remember reading somewhere that every soul wanders about the earth in an imperfect state until it meets the soul which is its destined companion, and in meeting becomes perfect. So I feel that my life was imperfect before I encountered you, but that now it has found its completeness. See how all things around us are in harmony, even things most incongruous in themselves—the sunshine with the snow, the cascades with the rocks from which they fall, the flower with the eternal glacier on whose icy brink it grows; all are brought together by the warm embrace of divine creative love, which through mysterious ways has drawn our souls together, darling—never more to part."

There was silence for a few happy moments;
then I went on—

“When we come from yonder little Protestant church to-morrow our destiny will have been fulfilled. We have had enough of separation and sorrow in the times gone by; after to-morrow, with God’s help, we will be together always. Now let us go—the Barringtons will wonder where you are; they did not even know that I arrived last night. They have taken good care of you; your cheeks are glowing like the flush on the Jungfrau itself.”

“You are not going through the wood, Cecil?”

“Why not?”

“Not through those gloomy pines; I am far too happy for that; happier than I ever thought it possible to be in this world! No; let us go round by the road, and keep in the sunshine; I am tired of shadows. Come, Ethel, darling!”



